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The X-MEN Chronicles

THE magazine for X-Men fans!

The X-MEN Chronicles

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Thanks to
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David Heath, Jr.
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Rocco Nigro
Jim Shooter (Marvel)
Thomas Skulan
Irene Vartanoff (D.C.)

Special Thanks to
Bill Anderson

THE X-MEN CHRONICLES #1 is published by **FantaCo Enterprises, Inc.**, 21 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12210, (518) 463-1400. Entire contents (unless otherwise specified) copyright 1981 FantaCo Enterprises, Inc. This is the first (and only) printing, July, 1981. Additional copies of this issue are available for $1.25 plus 75¢ postage (total $2.00) per copy from FantaCo Enterprises, Inc. at the above address. This magazine is the first in a series of publications spotlighting popular comic series. Watch for issue number two—"The Fantastic Four Chronicles."

1963

by Rik Mallory

TO RECALL THE GENESIS OF THE X-Men, one not only needs to remember the Marvel epoch during which they occured, but also something of the times that spawned that first Marvel generation of rebellious, troubled and emotionally vulnerable superheroes—heroes with hang-ups.

While the Soviets had lost much face over some missiles in Cuba, the United States was about to lose the youngest president it had ever elected (the only president in history ever to be so popular with kids) and with him, the remainder of its innocence. Prior to this, Cuba had chiefly been known as the home of Desi Arnaz.

New cars sell for around $2,600, comic books are an outrageous 12-cents and British actor Sean Connery has been licensed to kill. Cold war paranoia reigns. Surf-based culture and music dominates the post-payola rock scene, though you you keep hearing this song "Please, Please Me" by some group called the Beetles (you haven't even seen it spelled yet!). Most kids, if asked the whereabouts of Viet Nam, would guess Africa first, Canada second. The X-15 rules the skies, Juan Peron is in X-ile and Marvel's got no team of superheroes composed entirely of kids—high school- and college-aged kids—kids untested and on their own for the first time. At that time, groups of kids were considered dangerous! At best, car-crazed hamburger addicts, nothing to society and totally without right. All this is about to be X-ed out.

Rik Mallory is a commercial photographer and an avid collector of comic books. He often writes on comics and comic fandom.

Uncanny Mutations

GENETIC MUTATION INDUCED BY URANIUM and plutonium weapons had been a staple plot of science fiction since the end of Nick Fury's War (World War Two). The X-Men, however, were born of normal parents and were thus not directly responsible for their situations. Unlike the Amazing Colossal Man or Dr. Bruce Banner who got themselves into difficulties. The X-Men were only the first of a wave of post-war mutants.

Professor Charles Xavier, whose parents worked on the Manhattan Project, suspects he's only the first. In the X-Men both good and evil mutantkind have come to actually consider themselves a species apart (e.g. homo *superior* as opposed to homo *sapien*), the forerunners of what the human race must become or inevitably become replaced by. That the planet is big enough for both is the position of Xavier, and all peaceable, benign mutants. The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants do agree, as their many appearances attest.

Crippled by a childhood accident (this was later changed) Xavier learned early on "normal people feared and distrusted me!" he tells Jean Grey (Marvel Girl) in the premiere issue.* Grey is a prospective student to the X-clusive (sorry, I couldn't resist) private school for "gifted" people that Xavier now operates in Westchester County, New York. It is actually a sanctuary, a hideout for himself and others like him. Hounded by normal humans for being different, he teaches his pupils to control and understand their *Extra* powers, to ultimately benefit the same humans from whom they must keep their very existence a secret. (While it is commonly believed that "X" stands for Xavier, it actually refers to their "extra" powers.) In early issues we often find them being attacked by screaming mobs when in public. Imagine pulling that on the Wolverine!

Despite his baldness, the professor is really not that much older than his charges and this

relationship is the void the X-Men seemed to fill in the comic world at the time. The very premise of the X-Men series seemed to mirror the feeling of a lot of young people in the country at the time, which was that they were the first generation of post-war kids so different in values from their parents that they felt like mutated versions of their folks who had survived the war, the Depression, etc. Later in the decade they started calling this phenomena "the generation gap." In helping them to come to grips with their uncanny powers and themselves, the professor was the perfect authority figure: older, but not too much older. Authority yes, but only because they chose to stay. Cyclops *did* leave the school recently and was washed up on a strange beach (into the arms of Magneto of all people), but is now back in the fold. Magneto dates from the first issue, the Blob came in issue 3, and Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants date from issue 4.

Are We Not Men?

MIND READING, THOUGHT CONTROL, thought projection and astral projection are the powers of Charles Xavier, their leader. Originally five in number, the X-Men (like Spiderman of the time), were outcast heroes, heroes that nobody wants.

The members were: Bobby Drake, the Iceman and the youngest of the group, sort of a cool counterpart to Johnny Storm's hot-shot antics ("just showin' off!"). Hank McCoy, the Beast, who didn't really look all that beastly when compared to the current model (see *Amazing Adventures*, issues 11-17). In addition to huge hands and feet and super-human acrobatic skills, around the third or fourth issue Stan gave the Beast a super-human vocabulary. The Angel is kind of a resurrected character, at least in name. Warren Worthington III takes his name, the Angel, from Paul Gustavson's crime-fighter first introduced in Marvel Comics #1, circa 1939 (*Overstreet* says you can have a mint copy for a cool $14,000!). For more down-to-earth investing see Mitch Cohn's article elsewhere in this magazine.). *That* Angel didn't have any super powers at all, just a good build and dislike for crime. The winged X-Men was one-third of a lover's triangle that gave the early X-Men its bittersweet edge. Classy, blonde Warren loves Jean, Marvel Girl, whose power of telekinesis enables her to move and control objects without physical contact, while "Slim" Summers, as he's introduced in the first issue, dotes on her to the point of constant depression. She *cannot* return Warren's affection, and Cyclops, as the leader of the group, dares not show his true feelings. She is, of course, secretly in love with him. Marvel-ous, huh? Scott feels as though he's unfit for her what with those power-blast eyes and all.

Even the professor himself is not immune to fits of emotional depression. In "Divided We Fall" (*X-Men #22*) he's just declared a two-week holiday. "What a chance to visit my sister in Albany!" exclaims Marvel Girl. The professor watches through the window as he sobs "They can walk in the sunshine—feel the wind striking their faces, while I am confined to this wheelchair—a hopeless cripple! Is their no chance for me? Will I never walk again? I *can't* accept that fate! I can't!" Strong stuff. So these were the early X-Men, usually down, but never out. Thanks Stan! Thanks Jack! 'Nuff said! ■

**The X-Men*, September, 1963, story by Stan Lee, art by Jack Kirby.

X-Men, Roth and Thomas

by Steve Webb

I THINK IT MUST HAVE BEEN JEAN GREY'S death, in *X-Men #137*, that started me thinking about Werner Roth.

Funerals do that in real life, so why not in comic books? Roth was the artist for X-Men first inking Jack Kirby's layouts and then taking the magazine over, during the middle '60s. To these eyes, that was the period when *X-Men* first started to become a distinctive magazine, and the element that caused that distinction had to do with how the personalities and relationships blossomed at Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. The script then was by Roy Thomas, shortly after he began working for Marvel in 1965.

Thomas's career since then is well-charted, but whatever happened to Roth? As the artist during those years, he had something to do with the direction of the writing, but unlike some of the other *X-Men* artists for the original team—such as Jim Steranko, Neal Adams and Don Heck—the rest of his career is less clear.

Although several people at Marvel, reached by telephone, didn't know the name, Marie Severin did and provided an answer. Werner Roth died at about the same time as Bill Everett and Syd Shores. His death didn't receive as much notice at the time because the other two played such an important role in the development of comic book heroes, particularly for Marvel.

Several things about those issues of *X-Men* came out talking to Thomas, however. The writer and editor who recently left Marvel for D.C. Comics and is working on several new projects in addition to a collaboration with Gene Colan on Wonder Woman, notes that *X-Men* and *Teen Titans*, two magazines based on younger superhero teams, are presently the best-selling magazines for their respective publishers, Marvel and D.C.

"I think Stan's idea when he started *X-Men* was to have a whole team of Human Torches, kids that were somewhat immature," Thomas recalled. "That was before I came to Marvel, but it was the impression I got when I took over the writing."

Roth became the artist at the same time, beginning a relationship Thomas described as friendly but not particularly close. "there was an obvious age difference; Werner was 20 years older than me, and he wasn't particularly healthy then." John Tartaglione, who inked several of Roth's *X-Men*, said that the artist's health played an eventual role in his leaving the strip, after having to alternate with other artists to keep up with the deadlines at the end.

Thomas said that the concentration on the personal lives of the various mutant heroes, and particularly on their romantic entanglements, had to do with their backgrounds. "Like Gene Colan and John Romita, Werner's experience before Marvel was mostly in romance comics, and in many ways his style wasn't suited for action artwork. His actual drawings were a little like Kirby's at that time, but quieter. He didn't put in very much excitement."

The Romita parallel works two ways. By the time Romita took over Spiderman in issue 39, Steve Ditko had created a dozen villains that have continued to reappear in the strip, including the Green Goblin, Doctor Octopus and Kraven the Hunter. Romita created two, the Kingpin and the Rhino.

Similarly, both artists developed the characters in the book's private side. "People tell me that I was bringing things out in those characters that are still there," Thomas ad-

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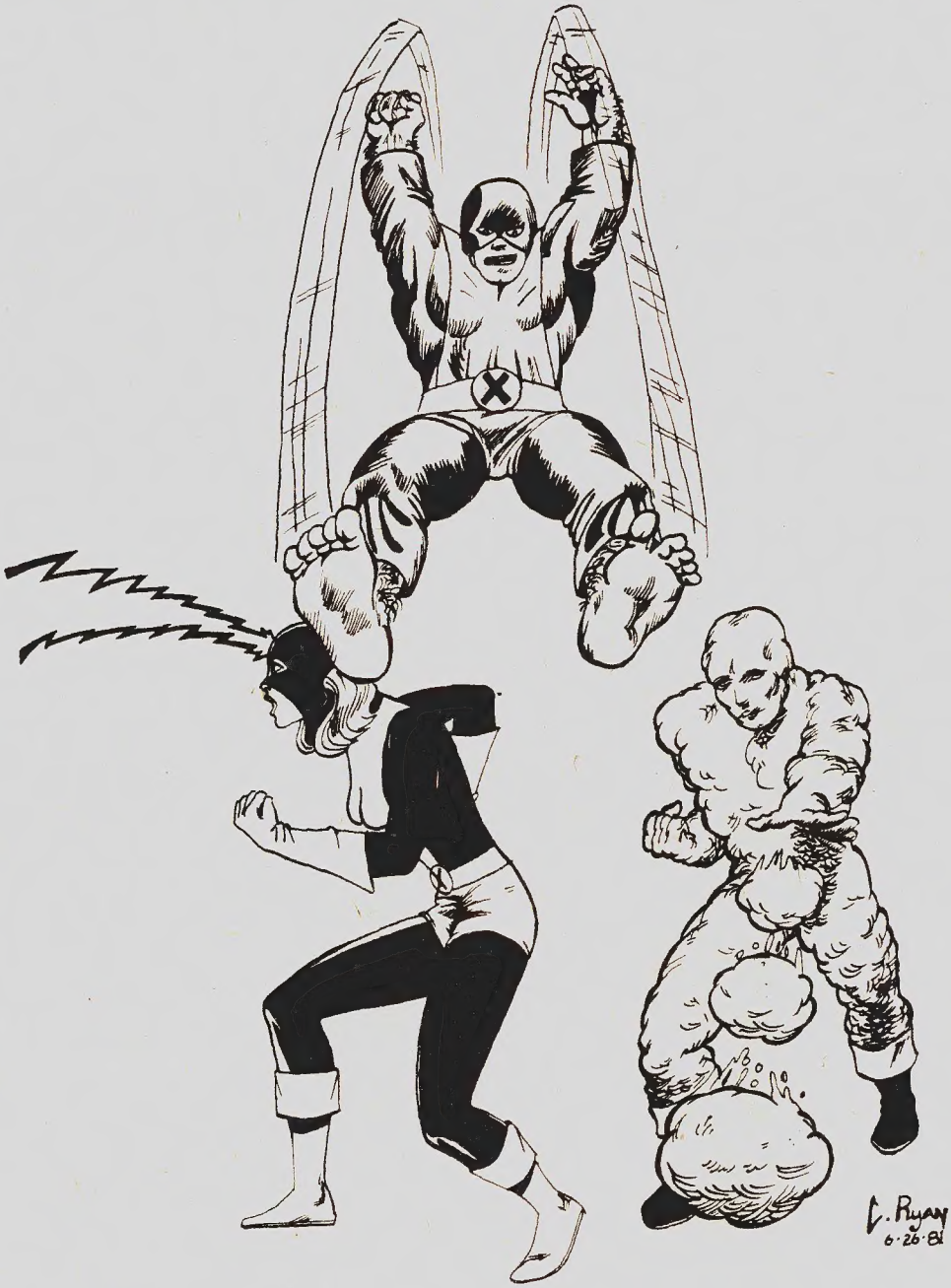
Steve Webb is a reporter for the (Albany, New York) Knickerbocker News.



mitted. "I got a lot of good response back then from Vera, the Beast's girlfriend, who was really Stan's idea, and Candy, the Angel's girlfriend who kept appearing off and on after that. I was very much influenced by what Stan and John Romita were doing in *Spiderman* at the time."

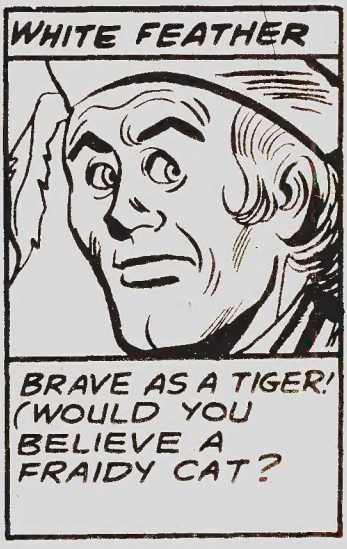
As the strip has developed now, much of the interplay among the characters remains true to the Thomas-Roth period, although present editor Louise Jones said she is trying to approach the strip with as fresh an attitude as possible. "I've only started to go back and read all the previous issues in the last month or so," she said. Jones, who came to Marvel after leaving Warren, was assigned to finish the editing of *X-Men #137* within two weeks of her arrival. "I've been reading them backwards, basically, except for the very early Stan Lee-Jack Kirby issues," she continued. "I think that Chris Claremont, who is the common denominator for much of the magazine since it resumed with the new team, is probably most influenced by the period when Neal Adams was drawing the strips. But the personal themes have always been strong."

By the way, Thomas didn't read the story of Jean Grey's death, although he thinks it was probably a bad move in general. "I don't read as many comics as I used to in 1974, since I left as editor-in-chief at Marvel. My main reaction is what I heard about the politics, that the story was done and then it was redone," he said. "I like the character. I think she's a popular character, and there are probably ways to bring her back if someone wants to. But when you quit writing a strip, you have to assume that how someone else writes it is valid, just as much as my Conan is valid even though I wasn't Robert E. Howard." The character had progressed from Marvel Girl to Phoenix since he quit writing it, he continued, and the character he scripted still exists in the issues he wrote.

Doing one of those "where are they now?" stories always has pitfalls. A friend wanted to hunt down a '60s soul singer recently, only to find him sitting in the office of the first old associate he telephoned.

In this case, the death of Jean Grey—a character who was certainly popular, as Thomas suggest, and even a subject of that vicarious infatuation comic book characters evoke—led to somewhat belated news of the death of an artist who helped set the tone for Grey as a romantic figure mostly because that's what he knew how to do best. ■

X-Men Yet Not X-Men



by Roger Green

WHAT IS THE MOST OBSCURE APpearance by the X-Men? Enthusiastic collectors will scurry through their prized Marvels unsuccessfully, for the issue in question is *Showcase #65* (November-December 1966) featuring the Inferior Five.

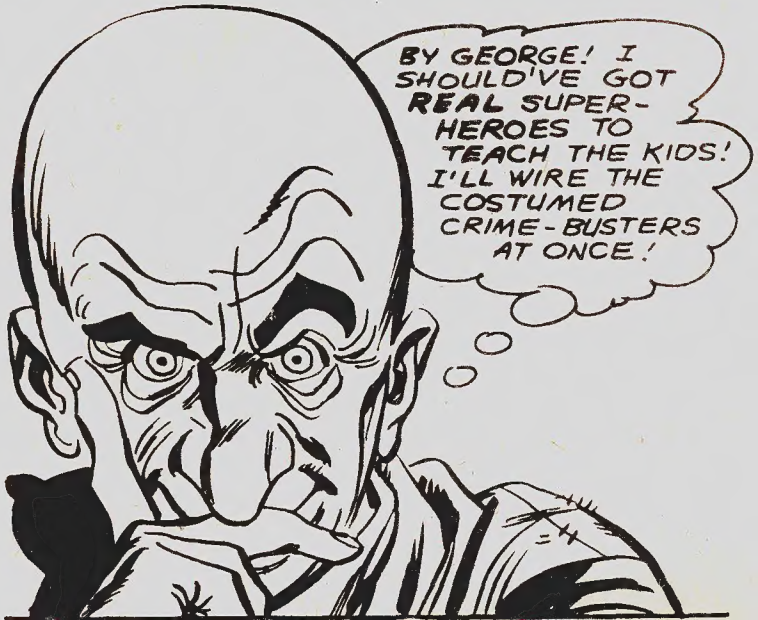
Showcase? Inferior Five? Isn't that D.C.? It sure is, and of course, it isn't the real X-Men, but rather a wickedly clever parody written by E. Nelson Bridwell called "Agony at the Academy" or "A Scrap'll Floor the Teacher." The pencils were done by Mike Sekowsky with inks by Mike Esposito.

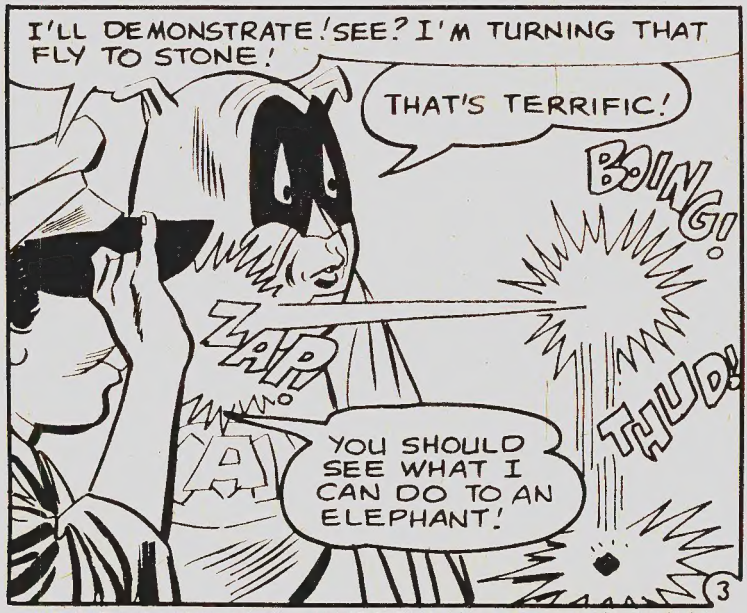
The first page introduces the stars of the book in the usual derisive terms. The bottom panel is a representational splash showing Awkwardman demolishing some gym equipment while a bald man explains how unbreakable it is.

The story really begins on page 2 with Egghead, the well-dressed bald man, pleading unsuccessfully with the departing faculty of his Academy for Super Heroes to remain. This man, a dean instead of a professor, is clearly Charles Xavier of the School for Gifted Youngsters (sans the wheelchair but with a pot belly).

Via telegrams, Egghead solicits the aid of the Justice League, the Doom Patrol, Metamorpho, the Metal Man and Super-Hip to no avail. He then, in desperation, seeks the Inferior Five, who of course respond to his call. In his greeting to the I.F., the dean refers to his charges as "atavistic" or evolutionary throwbacks. Compare this with the X-Men's "homo superior," beings beyond the evolutionary chain of normal humans.

The Inferior Five next see a being reading a book while holding onto an overhanging lamp and peeling a banana with his feet. His name is Harry McElhinney, known as the Ape. "Hairy" would later become a most accurate description for his counterpart with the X-Men, Hank McCoy, the Beast. Note that both first names are nicknames starting with the letter "H" and that both last names start with "Mc." (Inci-





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dentally, the Angel called the Beast "that big ape" in *The X-Men #1* when Marvel Girl repelled McCoy's amorous advances.) Both are highly literate and have multisyllabic vocabularies.

The Inferior Five then meet Irish Autumns, the Basilisk. Like Scott Summers (Cyclops), the first name is a British Isles ethnic group (or variation thereof), while the last name is the plural of a season. Basilisk, who was named after a mythical monster whose breath and glance were fatal, can lift his visor and turn anything to stone. Cyclops, named after three giants in Greek mythology with one enormous eye in the middle of their respective foreheads, opens his visor and unleashes a powerful energy bolt.

The next encounter the I.F. has is with Melvin Murgatroyd XIV, alias Icarus, whose moniker shares the alliterativeness and rhythm (two syllables, 3 syllables) of his X-Men counterpart, Warren Worthington III, the Angel. Both last names have an "upper-crust" sound to them, punctuated by the numerical tag and "M" is an upside-down "W." Both fly, although Icarus, whose designation derived from the Greek mythological character who flew too close to the sun with his wax wings, had some trouble contracting his wings.*

Billy Gander, Winter Wonderland, is next. Clearly, he and Bobby Drake, the Iceman, share similar diminutive first names and each has a last name which is a male fowl.

*In *The X-Men #54*, the Living Pharoah says "I will bring you down to Earth like mighty Icarus—whose wings melted at the sun's kisses."

HEY! WHY DON'T YOU PUT UP SOME SCREENS?
THIS IS THE STUDENT WE'RE FONDEST OF--BECAUSE HIS FATHER IS VERY WEALTHY AND VERY RICH--MELVIN MURGATROYD XIV, ALIAS ICARUS!

Finally, there is Penelope Pink, Levitation Lass. She lifts herself rather than other items as does Jean Grey, Marvel Girl. Note the color schemes in the last names. Unlike Jean, who thought her costume would give clothes designer Christian Dior "a run for his money" in *The X-Men* #1 (no taste, she!), Penelope complained about the similarity of her costume to those of her male counterparts—flopping

cap, loose white top and pants. Dumb Bunny's alterations (a top with a bare midriff, and shorts) make the Lass's male partners agog with delight.

The Eggsmen, as they are later called, run roughshod over the Inferior Five in the gym, before the dean interrupts with a letter from the Drawbacks' Fan Club. Unfortunately, they do not realize that the correspondence is from the Fraternity of Atavistic No-Goodniks, a parody on the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. F.A.N. consists of Frog Man (the Toad); Pterano Don Juan, as flashy in the air as Quicksilver (Pietro) is on the ground; Angel Fish, a near rhyme with Scarlet Witch; Mr. Amoeba, whose form is quite malleable, just as Mastermind is able to change his form; and the leader, Dr. Dinosaur, like his counterpart Magneto, the mental superior of his collegues.

Part II: "Two Brains are Better Than One" starts with Dr. Dinosaur explaining that he has a brain at each end of his spine. Meanwhile, the Ape is unhappy about the planned trip to Megapolis, but he ends his tirade to Merryman with the famous Stan Lee-ism "'Nuff said!"

The following day, the expedition starts with the Ape reminiscing about the Clancy Street Gang (?), and Awkwardman crashing through an office window while the office staff banters in the best Fantastic Four-meets-with-Marvel tradition. Meanwhile, the villains, aided by Dumb Bunny's note—"If you're our fan club,

L-LOOK--A FLYING CARPET!
NO--THAT'S PENELOPE PINK, ALSO CALLED LEVITATION LASS! SHE USES AN ABILITY THAT GOES BACK TO THE MYSTERY OF HOW THEY BUILT GIANT MONUMENTS LIKE THE PYRAMIDS, IN THE ANCIENT WORLD!
PRIMITIVE MAN PROBABLY POSSESSED HER POWER!

PART II
"TWO BRAINS are BETTER than ONE!"
I'M JUMPING FOR JOY BECAUSE SOON, WE'LL RULE THE WORLD!
I'D LIKE TO SEE BATMAN TRY THIS MANEUVER!
PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER, AMOEBA!
I JUST GOTTA SPLIT, MAN!

the key's under the doormat. If you're a burglar, forget it."—ambush the goodniks.

Part III: "Some Throwbacks Should be Thrown Back" shows Awkwardman escaping the fracas. He falls into the Academy's swimming pool and quickly falls in love with Angel Fish, who had stayed out of the fight. At the same time, Basilisk downs Frog Man, White Feather and Dumb Bunny vacuum up the fragmented Amoeba, and Winter Wonderland ices up Don Juan. As Dean Egghead realized that *Dr. Dinosaur is of two minds, he and Merry*-man direct Dumb Bunny and the Ape to a successful two-pronged attack. Finally, Dumb Bunny "rescues" a reluctant Awkwardman from Angel Fish.

Merryman admits that he and his cohorts are not up to training the aviastic youth and calls upon the Inferior Five's parents, the Freedom Brigade, for assistance. The members of the brigade bear a striking resemblance to certain D.C. characters if they were grossly overweight, such as Princess Power (Wonder Woman) and Mr. Might (the original Captain Marvel), or plain crazed, like Captain Swift (the Flash). They prove to be tougher taskmasters than their predecessors.

The story is basically silly, as parodies often are, but then the idea of the Inferior Five was to put out good-natured frivolity to the genre of the "cosmic" world of the superhero. In this attempt, at least, they succeeded. ■

Jim Shooter Interview

by Harry Broertjes

Writer Harry Broertjes conducted the following telephone interview with Jim Shooter in May of this year.

HARRY BROERTJES: It's been a few months since John Byrne left the *X-Men* art assignment. What's been the reaction to that—creatively and from the fans?

JIM SHOOTER: Well, my feeling and my experience generally have been that the creative people make the books and books make the creative people. I think that anyone who is any good at all who is drawing *X-Men* right now would instantly become a star. [Dave] Cockrum is real good. I'm not saying no one noticed the switch—and I think there were a certain number of people who were disappointed, who didn't like Dave's stuff as much as John's. I think there are a certain number of people who prefer Dave's stuff. In general, the impact we've seen is virtually nil; the two sides sort of balanced out. *X-Men* still seems to be the book everyone's excited about.

HB: How about as far as the mail is concerned?

JS: From what Chris [Claremont] tells me, it's all been pretty positive. It's funny—on almost all of the books, the letters we get are overwhelmingly positive. Books that get a lot of negative mail have been few and far between. Kirby's *Captain America* got a lot of negative mail, as did a couple of others I could think of. That's so infrequent that it really does make us sit up and take notice. But in general, you get a couple of guys complaining that Byrne's gone, and you get a couple of people who rave that Cockrum and [Joe] Rubenstein are better than Byrne and [Terry] Austin. Sales-wise, the book seems to be soaring right along. I think it may have dropped a couple of units on the direct market at first, but it's still our number one title there, far and away.

HB: There seems to have been a change in the *X-Men* over the past few years. Byrne's departure is probably the most obvious example of that. But there's also the trend at Marvel, which you've initiated, away from the long, drawn-out stories and more toward single-issue stories, maybe with plot threads connecting over a longer period of time. How do you perceive that as affecting the *X-Men* and its attraction for the fans?

JS: A lot of people feel that if it's selling, don't touch it. My feeling is . . . well, I've been around a long time, I've worked with pretty much the best people ever available, I've developed my own instincts, I've been privy to the sales information, the mail and everything for a long time, I've talked to an awful lot of people, and I've really gathered, I think, a very, very solid base from which to make judgments. I also have a very strong background in writing, which I owe mostly to Mort Weisinger, who was a great technician and a good teacher, if nothing else. I feel that if you do it right, it'll sell better. And so I constantly tell everyone—editors and writers and artists—"Screw the sales. Don't talk to me about sales. If we do a book that I like, and you like, and we're excited about, the sales will take care of themselves." When I see something with any book, including *X-Men*, that I think is wrong or a mistake, I don't hesitate to make it better, because if we do it right, it'll sell better.

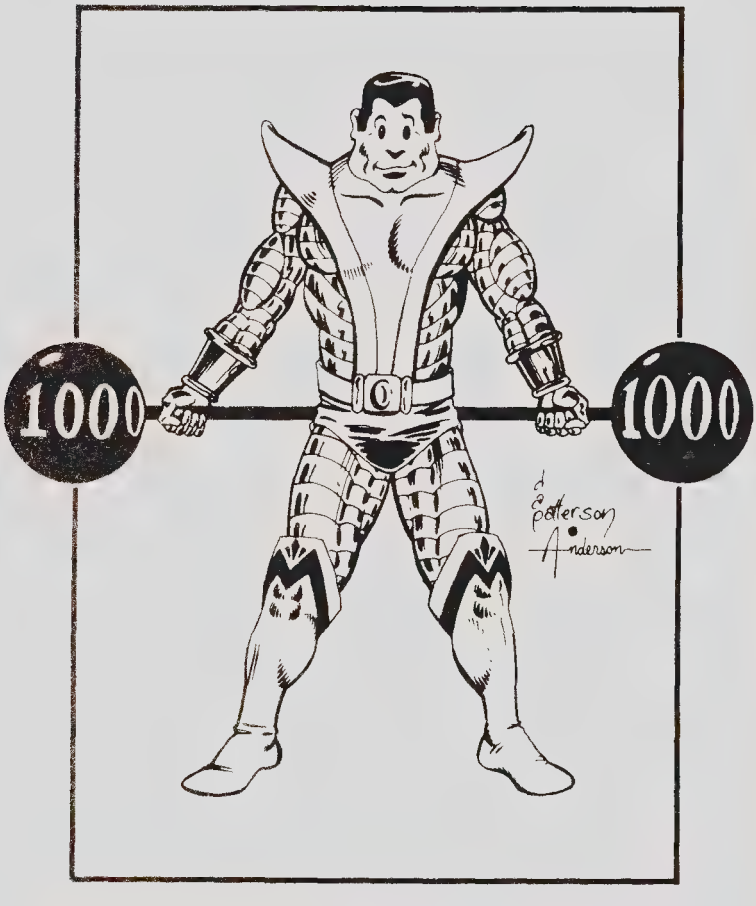
A lot of people have interpreted that, when they hear just that much of it, as meaning I have some kind of iron-clad, dictatorial way of running the books, and that I'm telling Chris, "Well, I want you to do this, and then we'll have this story and that story." And that's not really true; I'm only talking about fundamentals. I leave the huge bulk of those kinds of decisions up to the writers and artists. The only thing I talk about is how to build up a story. What stories they build, I don't care—as long as there's a story there.

HB: There was a lot of controversy over the changes that you ordered in the conclusion of the Phoenix story [*X-Men #137*]. What, exactly, is the extent of the supervision that you do here? We know that you don't usually see the stories until you get the make-readies from Sparta. Is it more a case of editing the editors, or do you . . .

JS: That's what I think of it as—a case of editing the editors. I'm involved with the stories as little or as much as they want me to be. Occasionally, they'll come to me with a problem or something like that, and I'll help them solve it, even to the extent of sitting in with the writer and the editor and helping them plot the story—which is one of my best tricks, actually. That's something I do better than a lot of people. Or, the more usual way is that I don't see anything until I get the make-ready. I read the make-ready with a ball-point pen in my hand and I mark things in the margins. And then I go over it with the editor, and presume the editor will convey these things to the writer and take in hand whatever problems I identify.

Generally, when there's some kind of big development brewing, they'll consult with me first. In the case of *X-Men*, Chris had this sweeping saga planned. It's sort of Chris's habit to walk around and tell everyone all of his plots. He gets excited about them; he's always telling everyone, "Oh, I've got this idea, and this is what I'm gonna do," and somewhere along the way he was telling me what he was going to do with his *X-Men* saga. Looking back, I'm pretty sure that at some point, he must have mentioned to me that he was going to wipe out some asparagus people—and I don't think I fully realized what he was saying there.

I think the genesis of it, as I recall, was this: He gave the Phoenix character all of this power—and, see, that's a great thing, actually. That's a good way to win fans over to your books. It's a way of gaining instant acceptance for your characters. Way back when Julie Schwartz first introduced Green Lantern in *Justice League*, in the first several issues Green Lantern ended up solving the problem, coming off as very powerful and so forth.



Chris realizes that, too, so he was getting into areas of the Phoenix which were bound to be popular. And the thing was, I could see it as a problem with what I consider to be the general reason for the existence of the book. I perceive the books's identity as "Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters." Maybe they're grad students now. But it's a very human book; it's a book with characters who are sort of like the ultimate minority. And I felt Chris really was in danger of removing the whole concept from its base. So, knowing I was taking what could be an unpopular stand, I said, "Chris, let's keep the character where we can still have a believable conflict on Earth." I mean, if we've got a character in the X-Men who can duke it out with Galactus, it defeats that element of the book.

Well, one of the options Chris came up with was the possibility of making Phoenix into a villain. And I thought, "Great!" A long-standing Marvel character—a hero—becomes a villain. I can't think of when it's been done—not seriously, not permanently. It was a revolutionary concept. So, far from telling him, "No," I said, "Great! Do it!" We went to lunch, Chris and Jim Salicrup and I, and worked out a plot, which I just loved, where Phoenix becomes a villain, for full-time and always. And then periodically after that, I'd hear that they had changed something or they were going to do something a little bit differently. I told Salicrup, "Look, I don't care. I don't want to be plotting stories for you guys; you shouldn't feel stuck with an idea because I suggested it. This should be a big deal—make it good, make it interesting, but don't worry about it if you want to do something different from what I said."

Everything was going along fine and I read the make-readies as usual, and then I came across this make-ready where Phoenix flies out into space and wipes out a planet of asparagus people. Oka-a-a-y. I could see that. The only thing was, elsewhere in that issue and in the subsequent issue, it was clear that she was still in a position to make choices. She goes home, she still is obviously struggling for control, she recognizes her parents and doesn't destroy them. She's still ambivalent; she's not all evil. I was interested in seeing how this whole thing came out, so I checked the upcoming issues and I found out that they [Princess Lilandra's Imperial Guard] were going to defeat her, put her on trial, and that ultimately her power would be somehow put in check and then she would be returned to Earth, basically "normal."

HB: Returning to square one.

JS: Yeah. And I didn't think that was a good way of handling it. It was almost like Chris didn't notice that this lady had committed genocide on the greatest scale ever. It was like, "Well, she's OK now." And I said, "Yeah, but she wiped out five billion people." "Well, she was crazy then." That's fine, but you just can't toss it off like that. I was kidding about us being bombed by the Jewish Defense League and stuff like that; it could be argued that Hitler was just a wacko, but he's OK now—he's painting houses again. The story was not a proper vehicle for those concepts; it reminded me of nothing so much as the origin of Element Lad [*Adventure Comics #307*, April 1963]. You remember that story, Harry?

HB: Sure.

JS: Maybe you thought that was a great story, and I did, too, but I think it's only great if you take it in the context of the time in which it was done and you use your mind to fill in some of the drama, which was kind of sloughed over. I mean, this guy's planet was wiped out and it was all taken matter-of-factly: "Space pirates wiped out my planet. (choke.)" Chris's story reminded me of that. It was written a little more glibly, but really, it was kind of the same thing: "She wiped out this planet of asparagus people. (Choke.) We'll always live with the memory." And I said, "No, no. Look, I want to have some sort of resolution, some sort of punishment for the crime. Let's have an *ending* for this story. I don't want Phoenix to be wandering around on planet Earth, drinking milk shakes and going out on dates with none of this stuff ever addressed to my satisfaction. Let's end this story." Also, it had been dragging on for so long that I didn't want it to have this one big thread left.

So I told Chris, "End it. I wanna kill her." And he said, "No! No! I don't wanna kill her!" *Then I started thinking about how we could* avoid killing her and still have justice served. I said, "Well, maybe you could keep her alive *if you do something horrible enough to her.*" And then Chris pointed out, rightly, that if she were ever imprisoned anywhere, the story *would become an endless cycle because the* X-Men would get together to try to rescue her, and they'd be defeated and they'd go home *and get it together to go after her again. They* would not rest until she was freed. I said, "You're right." And he said, "We'll have to kill *her.*" So *he devised a way to kill her—and he* killed her. After glibly dancing by all these big concepts, it was a glib way to give an ending to it.

On the heels of this, I told Chris, "What I want you to do now is a story where a hero, *either in a moment of madness or any way* you want, kills somebody. And then play it out. Let's go to trial, let's address all those concepts, let's design a story *that has that as* its theme. What the theme of this piece of stuff was, I don't know. Let's do a story that address all of this morality."

HB: So he is going ahead with something like that? Does he have any plans now for a *character he writes to kill somebody?*

JS: I don't know if he's doing something like that or not. It's like I said, I'd never force *anyone to use my suggestions—and they* generally don't.

But one thing I am forcing Chris and Louise *[Jones] to do is establish that Wolverine* hasn't killed anyone.

HB: That would be kind of hard to do, *wouldn't it? We've seen him kill people. Pre*sumably.

JS: We're going to fix that. I don't want the heroes killing people, and as far as I'm concerned, Wolverine hasn't killed anyone. Chris said, "Yes, but he's a homicidal maniac." I said, "Chris, that's what you call a 'conflict.' This is the essence of 'story.' " Here's a hero, a guy who's on the side of the good guys, basically, who is also a homicidal maniac. God, that's fodder for a million stories! You've got Professor X—he's gotta keep this guy here because you can't let *him* loose, and while he's there, he's a constant threat to everyone he comes into contact with. What a story device! That's wonderful! I said, "If I were writing the book tomorrow, I'd immediately do a story where we see everyone Wolverine was supposed to have killed." Some of them were, maybe, wounded pretty bad Some of them are, maybe, incapacitated in some way. And they get checks in the mail every month from Xavier—and one of Xavier's big worries is, "God, should I do something about Wolverine? *Should I use my mental powers and go* into his mind and fix it? Or does that make me the worse tyrant who ever lived?" In other words, *it's a real problem*—and problems, that's the *definition* of a story. A conflict resolved. Here we've got a brilliant conflict and *there's nothing being done with it.*

The other day, I took Louise to lunch and I said [menacingly], "I want my story with *Wolverine's victims alive.*" "OK, *all right,*" she said, "we've been sort of putting it off. But we'll do it." I don't know if they're going to *follow my suggestion and play out the whole* thing with Xavier worrying over Wolverine and sending checks to the victims and that kind *of thing. But one way or another, we're gonna* demonstrate that he hasn't killed anyone—*until such time* as Chris is ready to have him *kill someone and then play it out, address that* new conflict. OK, he's killed someone. Now what does Xavier do? Let's have the guy *brought to trial. Let's see if it's OK for him to* kill someone. Let's see if it was self-defense. Or was it not necessary? And if it wasn't, what *do they do?*

HB: A case of living with consequences of something instead of going off into the sunset.

JS: Right. I wanna see the consequences. That's apparently a tough concept for a lot of people at Marvel [laughter].

HB: I've heard there was a possibility that Phoenix might somehow be coming back and that you'd been giving some thought to that.

JS: Naw, that's all wishful thinking. I don't want her back. I'm trying to make death irrevocable at Marvel. If the villain falls into a volcano, you can be sure he'll be back, right? But

if we kill a character and do it in a convincing way, I want that character to stay dead. I want to preserve our credibility. I think that's one of the key things to doing what we're trying to do—to having a mythology.

HB: What prompted the issue of *What If?* [#27] that came out not too long after Phoenix's death—"What If Phoenix Had Not Died?" Was that just an attempt to milk the last out of her death?

JS: There are really only two kinds of stories that should be in *What If?*: One is stories about giant, major points of Marvel continuity that most people would be familiar with. I think most readers have a nodding familiarity with Spiderman's origin, so that would be a giant, major point. Maybe something about the Galactus trilogy.

HB: The Phoenix story, then, seemed to fit in with that notion.

JS: No, actually, the Phoenix story is part two. The other thing is that we should do *What If*s about points of Marvel continuity *which are less significant than, say, Spider*man's origin, but which are recent. If we do a story like Phoenix's death and come out' right on the heels of it with a *What If?*, that's what I want to do. We did the same thing with "What If Captain America Had Been Elected President?" [*What If? #26*], which came out right after Cap was offered the presidential nomination.

HB: Let's shift gears here a little bit. What has been the reaction at Marvel to the Teen Titans? A lot of comparisons have been drawn between the Teen Titans that Marv Wolfman and George Perez are doing for D.C., and the X-Men. Len Wein, the *Teen Titans* editor, says there's no connection whatsoever because, after all, he created the new X-Men. But there does to seem to be, from time to time, some stylistic similarities and that sort of thing. How do you see it?

JS: Well, first, I should point out that Len is fond of saying he created the new X-Men when, in fact, I think Dave [Cockrum] had at least as much to do with it as Len, maybe more. I've only read a couple of issues of the *Teen Titans*, and my feeling about it is that I don't find it a lot like the X-Men at all; I find it sort of like the old Avengers because of the heavy George Perez influence. Basically, I guess they do some interesting stuff; I just don't think they've done anything revolutionary. I don't think they've done anything I haven't seen before.

HB: What prompted the change in plans for the crossover tabloid with D.C.? Originally, it was going to be the X-Men and the Legion of Superheroes, and now it's going to be the X-Men and the Teen Titans. Was that Marvel's idea or D.C.'s idea?

JS: D.C.'s idea. I think it's a mistake; I think they'd be much better off with the Legion. It's a more-established series and it has better characters—and more-recognizable characters, like Superboy. I think the *Titans* is sort of their hot book right now, but the Legion has really been a consistent winner that they ought to go with. I mean, for the same reason we did Superman and Spiderman rather than Superman and the X-Men—because *X-Men* is really our hot book right now—I think it would make more sense to go with the Legion, the long-standing top book.

HB: *Marvel's going to be producing the tab*loid, right?

JS: Right.

HB: Claremont will write it?

JS: Yep.

HB: Cockrum will draw it?

JS: Well, that was the theory; I don't know. I don't know if Dave can or will, but that was the theory. If he doesn't, I've got some alternatives.

HB: When will the book be coming out?

JS: Next summer, I believe. I think the Batman-Hulk book is supposed to be out this Christmas, and then the X-Men and Teen Titans next summer.

HB: Getting back to the concept of the X-Men as heroes-in-training, so to speak—if I can turn that around just slightly, it might be a little bit less flattering, but it sounds an awful lot like you were talking about second-string heroes. *The X-Men have been around for years* and years; they've been around longer—at least the mainstays such as Cyclops—than a lot of other Marvel heroes like Spiderwoman, for example. If you want to talk about maintaining a convincing mythology, isn't it about time for more of them to move on and become heroes in their own right instead of being under constant supervision and training?

JS: Well, see, the X-Men aren't heroes, strictly speaking. As far as I'm concerned, I don't know if Marvel has too many heroes—maybe Captain America and a couple others. The X-Men are not heroes. They don't want to go out and fight crime. That's not their goal. See, this whole thing is Xavier's dream. What he has realized is that there are mutants *abroad in the world; they are people who have* power; therefore, they will be feared and suspected and maybe hunted and hurt or in some way persecuted. So he came up with the concept of a refuge—an aid station for mutants, basically. He tries to find these people when they are young, as their mutant powers are developing, and get them under his tutelage so that he can do several things: So that he can teach them how to deal with humans, because they are different from humans; teach them how to deal with themselves—that is, to understand what this power is that separates them from others and to make it work for them; and third, to be a force against those people who are evil mutants, or who would use mutants for their various subjective purposes.

HB: To put it euphemistically.

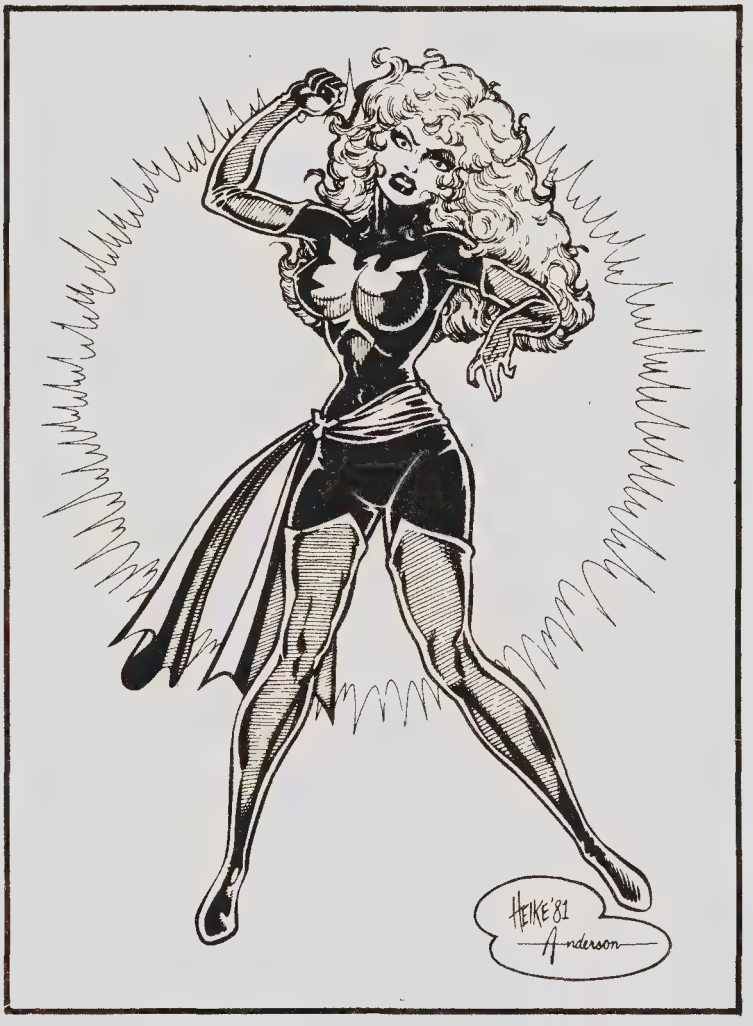
JS: Xavier realizes that, just as mutants are hunted and persecuted, there is a potential for mutants to be hunters and persecutors. So the noble purpose that he has, besides helping these mutants cope with the world and themselves, is to defend the world against mutants who might seek to exploit their powers.

HB: That sounds like the X-Men, whether you want to call them heroes or not, are on the front lines, the champions of the good mutants of Earth.

JS: Well, what I'm saying is that they have a purpose. Now, OK, so they come to Xavier. He gets them when they're young, and so out of necessity the place is a school. Just because they get older, the school is no less a refuge and no less a place for training or understanding. I think a more-natural evolution than having the X-Men go out into the world to be heroes would be just to have them go out into the world to get married and have kids, to fit in, to be engineers, to be lawyers, doctors, Indian chiefs, whatever. *I don't think* Xavier's in the business of manufacturing heroes. As long as he has a school and he has mutants at his disposal, he will use them as a strike force against the bad guys. But that's not, as far as I see it, his primary motive. So if you're wondering why these guys don't graduate and go on, I think they should, and they might; some already have. I don't think that necessarily means that you'll have Wolverine Comics, where he's running around, catching crooks—that's not, to me, a natural part of the evolution. I think it's perfectly reasonable for the X-Men to stick around, because they keep proving to themselves that the prejudice against them is real.

Still, what you've done here is identify another conflict. To me, that's not a problem with the series; that's the stuff of a story—of many stories. If I were writing the book, I would immediately work on a plot that involved that very thing, sort of a what-are-we-still-doing-here, now-what-do-we-do? type of thing. That's a real good thought. Pay attention, Chris. ■

Harry Broertjes wants you to know that Legion Outposts #10 *is now available from FantaCo Enterprises, Inc.*



Ups and Downs With the Uncanny X-Men

by Sandy Hausler

IMAGINE THE FEELING I HAD WHEN, ON a sunny March afternoon in 1975, I picked up a copy of *Giant-Size X-Men #1* at a neighborhood pharmacy. You can't, unless you were a 16-year-old high school sophomore who had a love affair with comics in general and the X-Men in particular. I ran all the way home and searched for my kid brother to share my treasure with him. Then I sat down to savor the long-awaited return of the uncanny X-Men.

In the six years that have passed since the beginning of the new X-Men run, I have become much more jaded than I was in high school and much less easily impressed. I still buy the X-Men and I still enjoy them, but I'm not blind to their faults. *The X-Men* have become a sacred cow in comic fandom, rarely, if ever, criticized. (The extensive study by Richard Howell and Carol Kalish in *The Comics Journal #49* on the problems of characterization in *The X-Men* is a notable exception.) It seems to me, however, that there is quite a bit that should be brought to the attention of the current creative team in order that they not repeat old mistakes.

The first point is the purpose for the X-Men. Each super-team must have some unique element to justify its existence. The X-Men's unique element was that they were students in a school for mutants, that Professor Xavier would train them to fight evil mutants. Chris Claremont chose to ignore this aspect, thus eliminating the last vestige of the School for Gifted Youngsters. The original mission was all but forgotten. The first time that the X-Men went out with the express purpose of dealing with a mutant menace was in issue 125, when they went after Proteus. In every earlier adventure they either stumble onto some menace by accident or are attacked. The entire direction of *The X-Men* was lost. The characters became a bunch of stumblebums, who just wander into situations.

As the author, Claremont can do as he pleases; however, he must substitute other elements that account for the existence of the group. This he has not done. From the very beginning there were problems. Thunderbird dies right off the bat (issue 95). Wolverine does not get along with Storm, Nightcrawler and Cyclops (page 6, issue 94; page 7, issue 96). Colossus is homesick. Aside from Nightcrawler, who needed a haven from the hatred of homo sapiens, none of the X-Men had any strong reasons for staying, initially.

The second point is the role of Cyclops in the new X-Men. While Cyclops was an extremely effective and resourceful team leader for the old X-Men, he seems to be lacking in his effectiveness with the new team. He has at every juncture increased the antagonism between himself and Wolverine. In issue 94 he threatens Wolverine (page 6). In issue 97 (page 31) he hits Wolverine. In issue 104 he threatens to blast Logan and carry him out of Magneto's fortress (page 27). In issue 114 he yells at Wolverine for the way that Wolverine saved Banshee (page 15). In issue 127, Cyclops goads Wolverine into a mock fight. In this sequence, Cyclops admits that he was trying to knock the psychological after-effects of meeting with Proteus out of Wolverine. The surprising thing was that Logan accepted that. Cyclops was lucky the he wasn't ripped to shreds.

Cyclops has also shown foolhardiness at least once (issue 100), when he insists on going alone after Scott Lang. It seems that Lang was no worse than any other X-Men foe, and Cyclops's mindless rage was not even remotely understandable.

Cyclops's effectiveness as a leader of the new X-Men can also be examined by looking

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at the field record of the new team. Most of their victories have been won by flukes (they beat the Juggernaut in issue 103 because Black Tom fell off the tower; they beat the Imperial Guard in issue 107 because of the intervention of the Starjammers; Mesmero was defeated in issue 111 by Magneto; Alpha Flight in issue 121 stopped fighting because of the storm and Wolverine's surrender), or by individual heroics (Kierrok was defeated by Storm in issue 96; Proteus by Colossus in issue 127; Moses Magnum by Banshee in issue 119; the Hellfire Club by Jean Grey in issue 134; etc.). Very few victories were won by teamwork or by Cyclops's strategy.

Despite his relative lack of success in forging the new X-Men into a team, Cyclops resented Professor Xavier's attempts to do the same by using the methods that were so successful in training the original team. Scott's only basis for thinking that Professor Xavier was handling the situation incorrectly was that Wolverine stormed out of a training session proclaiming that he won't jump through hoops for anybody (issue 129, page 10). However, for every instance that Wolverine got upset about training exercises, there are several others where he participated without a peep. Also, the basis for Xavier's training exercises is developing individual potential as well as team interaction. It is difficult to find a flaw in the logic for that kind of training.

It is apparent that Cyclops is unfit to lead the new X-Men. Ororo seems to be the logical replacement. While she and Wolverine have clashed (page 31, issue 97; page 17, issue 142), their relationship is less volatile than the relationship between Scott and Logan. She seems to have the respect of the entire group. Her leadership abilities seem to be more than equal to that of Cyclops, at least with regard to the new group. She seems to be more sensitive to the psyches of the X-Men (e.g. Wolverine, Sprite, Colossus). Scott Summers was the superlative leader of the original X-Men; Ororo is the leader for the new team.

A third point to bring up is Claremont's theory of the aging of comic book characters. This is not particularly a problem with *The X-Men*, though it has surfaced in *X-Men #127* lettercol and in issue 137 where it stated that Jean was born in 1956. Claremont's theory is that there is a compression of time in the Marvel universe. Of course as the compression gets greater over time, any serious reader is going to wonder why the heroes don't collapse from exhaustion. In *Comics Journal #50* both Roger Stern and Chris Claremont assert that the Fantastic Four have been together for seven years. Claremont then points out an inconsistency in that theory: "[that] means that Reed launched his top-secret space shuttle two years after the last moon shot." Obviously there is something wrong with the theory. The proper way to deal with the aging of comic book characters, since by comic book convention they are not allowed to age, is to ignore it. Claremont shouldn't say that the F.F. have been around for only seven years and that the X-Men (both teams) have been around for only five. The early X-Men series with its beatnik hangouts could no more exist in the '70s than the new X-Men series with its disco could exist in the '60s. It is best not to date characters by mentioning ages or birthdates. Changing the time frame of the stories twenty years after the fact just does not work.

Chris would do well to listen to this advice as he has already dated Ororo Munro. According to Claremont, Storm is thirty years old (*X-Men #102*, page 11). In 1956 Ororo was five years old assuming that she was newborn in the initial sequence. That meant that she was born no later than 1951, and is at least thirty years old. Obviously, Ororo is not going to age much more, but it's on the record that she was born in 1951. You see—it is possible for the X-Men to have been formed in 1963.

At this point I will begin my analysis of the complete run of the new X-Men. *Giant-Size X-Men #1*, written by Len Wein and drawn by Dave Cockrum, began the run. It was consistant with the *raison d'etre* of the X-Men. Professor Xavier went out to find a new group of mutants to rescue the old group who have mysteriously disappeared while investigating a potential mutant menace. The major fault of the story was that the mutant menace turned out to be an island. If you ignore that, the story reads well, especially the sequences where Xavier picks up his new X-Men, and gives a very optimistic picture of the future of the X-Men.

The best segment of the new X-Men run is, in my opinion, the Claremont/Cockrum issues —94 to 108. In the course of the fifteen issues they brought back Count Nefaria (my personal favorite X-Men villain), Havok, Polaris, the Sentinels, Juggernaut, and Magneto. Introduced in those pages were the Ani-Men, Kierrok (the only turkey in the bunch), Erik the Red, Stephen Lang, Phoenix, Black Tom Cassidy, Lilandra, the Imperial Guard, and the Starjammers. Firelord also made an appearance.

The only complaint I have with these issues is a plot thread that Wein bequeathed to Claremont, namely, the death of Thunderbird. I was rather fond of Thunderbird. I liked his costume and the fact that he was an American Indian. I felt that I understood his bitterness. I thought his death was senseless and I was vindicated by Claremont's own words in the *Comics Journal* interview (issue 50, page 52): "The point is that with the book a monthly, I can hint at things and build on them from issue to issue, 'cause it's only a four-week break. Len had to deal with a three-month break, even though he had twice the space. Which meant that he couldn't so much build as make the issue self-contained. If he'd taken the time for people to get to know Thunderbird, it could've been two or three years. So he decided, BOOM! Shock value! The team has barely gotten together and bang! Never happened in 12 years of the old X-Men! They'd never lost a character. And then, blam! Right off the bat, Thunderbird gets axed."

This statement is in direct contradiction to the explanation Claremont gave the readers in the lettercol of issue 97 where he says: "Why Thunderbird? Because he was the weakest potential character in the X-Men. He had no powers which weren't duplicated by other members of the team . . . but worse of all, his character—as a character—has nowhere to go . . . Proudstar deserved a better deal than that and he could never get it, which is why he had to die."

Besides showing that he lied to the readers, Claremont belittled his own talents as a character writer, which are considerable.

Ironically enough, soon after Thunderbird's death, Wolverine replaced Thunderbird as the angry loner who fights with Cyclops. And as for Claremont's claim that the other X-Men duplicated Thunderbird's powers, my first impression of Thunderbird was that he was a super-speedster *a la* Quicksilver as well as being incredibly strong (*Giant-Size X-Men #1*, page 16). No duplication there. What it comes down to is that the death of Thunderbird was a cheap, sensationalistic trick created by Len Wein, but perpetuated by Chris Claremont, who could have changed the whole thing with a slight alteration of the end of the plot.

The rest of the run was superb. Old foes blended with new ones perfectly. The Sentinels trilogy issues 98 to 100 can be compared favorably with the Thomas/Adams Sentinels epic. The emergence of Jean Grey as the extremely powerful Phoenix was well done and most importantly, the saga of Xavier's dream became an instant classic. Those were the days when you got hooked on the new X-Men.

The run from issues 109 to 124 has its ups and downs. John Byrne replaced Dave Cockrum and maintained the high quality of his predecessor. The introduction of Weapon Alpha/Vindicator/James MacDonald Hudson in issue 109 was well done and well thought out. Of course, the Canadian government would want Wolverine back. The Warhawk story was fairly well done, though I missed the Byrne art. The Mesmero/Magento story (issues 111 to 113) was superb, as was the introduction of Alpha Flight (issues 120 and 121). I was especially glad to see the Professor Xavier solo/origin story in issue 117.

Unfortunately, not every issue was as good as those mentioned above. After the X-Men went monthly in issue 113, the quality went down. The major problem was sloppy plotting.

The Savage Land story (issues 114 to 116) was interesting, but was probably unintelligible to the neophyte reader. A more detailed ex-

planation of Garokk, the Petrified Man, would have been helpful. "The Submergence of Japan" story (issues 118 and 119) had no redeeming qualities. The villain's plan was inane, and probably impossible, and the only possible reason for writing it was to dump Banshee and introduce Mariko Oshida. Misty Knight, who saw Jean Grey off at the airport in issue 117, should certainly have told Ororo that Jean was alive when she saw Storm in issue 122 (or even in Power Man/Iron Fist issue 57). Then there's Arcade, who was an interesting Spiderman villain, but whose tricks look ridiculous in *The X-Men*. The brainwashing and de-brainwashing of Colossus was so unbelievable that I don't understand how two such talented people could have thought it up.

Unfortunately, things did not get better as time went on. The most problematic run of the whole series was issues 125 to 143. Again we see lapses in judgment that cause otherwise good stories to become annoying. In issue 125 Professor Xavier suddenly decided to leave Lilandra's world and return to Earth because he suddenly realized that Jean couldn't control her Phoenix powers. Why the sudden change of heart? I'm sure Professor Xavier was aware of the scope of Jean's powers before he left Earth. The Mutant X story was predictable. Instead of having the X-Men use teamwork and strategy to beat Proteus, Claremont fell back on the usual one-man stand, in this case using Colossus. From the time Moira states in issue 126, page 16, that Proteus "has two fundamental weaknesses: his constant need for new bodies and metal," we know that Colossus would save the day. No more excitement. It's too bad, because the fight sequences were quite good, but Claremont took the easy way out.

Issue 129 started the Hellfire Club/Dark Phoenix story. This subplot had been building for some time and had been handled excellently. While diehard X-Men fans recognized Jason Wyngarde as Mastermind from the moment they saw his shadow in issue 122, page 11, the subplot was intriguing. The Hellfire Club was something new. In issue 129, however, Chris seemed to lose control. The X-Men were attacked by three men in armor designed to counter one specific X-Man's powers. They were easily defeated by having the X-Men switch partners, one of the oldest devices in comic books. The whole fight was unnecessary because the White Queen could have zapped them from the start and gotten Kitty Pryde, too. In issue 130 Ororo just *happened* to have a tag with the X-Men's phone number on it (page 11). Chris could have had Ororo just tell Kitty the number.

At the end of issue 131, Scott is upset that Jean used her powers to change Carmen Pryde's mind about Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. Mind tricks like that have been stock-in-trade of the X-Men for years, though. In issue 101, Professor Xavier used his powers to make everyone forget that the X-Men were ever at the airport. Professor X did similar things many times in the old X-Men series without any complaints from Cyclops. Scott's misgivings are not consistent with the character.

In issue 132, we are introduced at last to the Inner Circle of the Hellfire Club, including Harry Leland, who has the ability to increase mass. At first I thought that Claremont meant that Leland could increase a body's weight by increasing the gravitational force, but Claremont insisted that Leland could increase a body's mass, which is impossible.

At the end of issue 133, Cyclops is defeated by Mastermind in a sword fight on an astral plane. Mastermind asserts as he runs Scott through was that their duel was "to the death" (page 27). Scott collapsed and Nightcrawler proclaimed that "Cyclops is dead!" (page 30). At the beginning of issue 133 our intelligence is insulted when Nightcrawler obviously didn't think that the reader deserved any better than that.

In issue 134, Colossus is crushed under a solid gold tree (page 6). There is no possible way for a normal man not to be killed by that weight, yet Peter gets up unharmed when Beast lifts up the tree (page 15). Dark Phoenix flies off to her destiny among the stars, but after destroying a populated solar system and a star cruiser, she returns to Earth for no apparent reason other than that the X-Men are on Earth and want another crack at her.

The rest of the Dark Phoenix story was excellent. Jean paid the ultimate penalty for her crimes and to my mind any other conclusion would have been wrong. Jean Grey slaughtered five billion people and that's all there is to it. There was no way to keep the Dark Phoenix persona submerged permanently. The doubts of the X-Men as to whether they should fight for Jean was especially well done.

Issue 138, "Elegy," was the finest piece of recap work I have ever seen. I was especially gratified to see Scott leave for reasons I've outlined above.

After the death of Phoenix, things started to look up for *The X-Men*. The Alpha Flight/Wolverine/Nightcrawler story was well done and tied up some long-ignored plot threads. The Kate Pryde story was exceptional, ranking with Byrne's first Alpha Flight story, surely one of his better efforts. The new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants is an interesting bunch and the mysterious connection between Mystique and Nightcrawler is intriguing. I'm also glad we didn't see whether the future was changed or not. Some things are better left to the imagination. The only problem with that story is the last page. I cannot believe that President Carter would opt to violate the civil liberties of mutants in such a blatant fashion. I hope Project Wideawake lost its funding when Reagan took office. Maybe Xavier's F.B.I. connections could clue the president in on the importance of the X-Men. If the government does go through with Project Wideawake, it might make an interesting plotline to see the American Civil Liberties Union suing the government on behalf of muntantkind.

Issue 143, the Kitty Pryde solo story was very good and issue 144, the Claremont/Anderson story was fine except for one problem. Cyclops may be a mutant, but he would certainly die after falling a half mile (page 23). He certainly wouldn't just get up.

The Claremont/Cockrum stories have not shown any great improvement with respect to this problem of sloppy plotting. The Dr. Doom/Arcade story (issues 144 to 146) was entertaining, but it had its fault. Once Murderworld was attacked, Locke would assume that the X-Men had betrayed her and should have killed the hostages, so why bother springing Arcade? They should have hit Murderworld *en masse* instead of dividing into two teams. Speaking of Arcade, what did they do with him? They certainly didn't turn him over to Locke. Was he deposited at the nearest precinct? Claremont never says.

The Caliban story in issue 148 was good, but it also had a fault. Why did Caliban leave after he heard what Storm had to say? The friendship of mutants was exactly what he wanted. And how did he get by three superheroines?

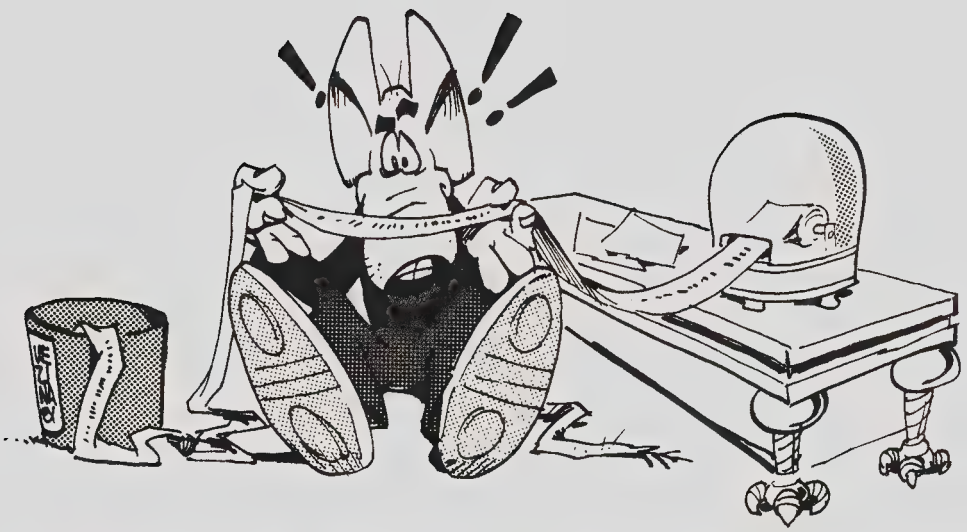
Issue 149 was a bad story with a good point. Garokk was bad the first time around. He was terrible this time. Claremont never bothered to explain why Kitty's phasing power hurt Garokk so much. Speaking of Kitty, that new outfit had better be a gag. I hope to see her in X-Men blues and yellows soon. The new costume is possibly the one thing that could make me stop buying *The X-Men*.

Now for the good point. This story brings us back to the grass roots X-Men. Professor Xavier sends the group out on a mission to investigate the possibility of a mutant menace, in this case Magneto. I hope Claremont plays this aspect up in future issues.

There are some loose ends in the series that need to be tied up. The X-Men's connection with the F.B.I. have never been made clear in the new series. The fate of Dragonfly (Issue 104, page 27) after she broke out of the Mutant Research Center was never revealed. The secret of the Council of the Chosen (issue 100, page 17) has never even been touched in fifty issues.

Where do I think *The X-Men* should go from here? I favor a return to basics. More of Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. More of Kurt and Peter double-dating like Hank and Bobby did in the old days. I think Scott should stay away permanently. (I'm as sentimental about the old X-Men as anyone, but I'm not going to let that stand in the way of quality.) Professor Xavier should be in command with Ororo as field commander. Siryn should be brought into the X-Men and maybe Vance Astrovik and/or Karma, too. After all, Professor X wants to train new mutants. We should see more mutant menaces. Magneto is a step in the right direction. I hope to see the Inner Circle and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. That's what the X-Men is all about—good mutants fighting evil mutants.

I'm somewhat distressed by what I've seen in *The X-Men* book. Most of the problems could have been resolved by stronger editorial control to catch the weaknesses in Claremont's stories. Unfortunately, Louise Jones has given Claremont a free hand. It's a shame. The X-Men used to be my favorite comic book. It's still up there on my list, but it takes a back seat to Daredevil, Iron Man and Master of Kung Fu. Clean up your act, Claremont. You've got the potential along with Dave Cockrum to make *The X-Men* number-one again. I wish you luck and remember—I'll be watching. ■



Wholesale Comic Investments

by Mitch Cohn

TRADITIONALLY, INVESTMENT IN COMic books has been geared towards acquiring single copies of the most sought-after back issues, attempted to buy (or bought) for a fraction of their true value. There are a number of good reasons to avoid this route of comic investment. For one thing, many people are already doing it. In fact, the vast majority of comic fandom indulges in this form of investment, even if its sole motivation is to improve the state of one's collection. So it follows that competition for the best issues is such that you're not likely to easily find a great bargain unless you're taking advantage of someone's ignorance, stupidity or desperation. Then too, you have to find these sheep to fleece, or make sure they can find you. This kind of investment involves long, hard hours of work preparing for, and attending comic conventions and single-day shows. Then there are the ads, you'll have to grade and list each item individually. One of the best reasons to avoid this form of investment is that popularity of a title, like stardom, often fades fast, making today's sixty-dollar book very hard to sell tomorrow.

Wholesale comic investments have a lot going for them. You won't be spending time grading the books. Acquisition is as simple as filling out an order form and making out a check. Inventory can be done fast and easily on paper, with copies of your order forms and outgoing orders. Each list listed in your advertisements will represent many possible sales, even with a minimum of five copies per issue stipulation, thus making better use of your advertising dollars. You'll experience the challenge of picking a winner and the great satisfaction that comes with being on the money. Best of all, when you are on the money, it is not unusual to see a quadrupling of your investment within a year.

To begin, you'll need a distributor to buy from. I can only recommend the distributor I have done business with and for four years I have been very satisfied: Sea Gate Distributors, located at 657, Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11215. Ten dollars will get you on their mailing list for one year. That's less than it'll cost them to mail the material to you. They offer a generous discount for an order as small as fifty dollars and their monthly comic order forms come with whatever information is available on each issue's contents. If you wish to deal with another distributor, you'll find advertisements in *Overstreet* and other publications.

After you've established an account with a distributor, you'll begin receiving their monthly order forms. Keep in mind that you'll be ordering in advance, three months with Marvel and two months with D.C. The order forms will list titles, issue numbers and prices. The additional information you'll receive concerning the creative team and a bit about the story of each issue should help you to separate the *Omacs* from *The X-Men*.

Choosing the issue to buy is easier than you might think. Follow the trends among fans, for it's the fan fanatic who will be most willing to pay a high price because he or she feels the need to own a particular issue. Of course, you won't be selling much to fans, but then, the stores and dealers you will be selling to will also be willing to pay a good price for a valuable issue. Issues that are to be drawn by the most popular artists are generally good bets, but you can get stung by last minute changes in the artistic line-up. Special giant issues (like the one-hundreth issue) of a very popular title are usually well worth your while. First issues of a book that makes it big are good money, but usually only in the long run, because so many people are likely to buy up large quantities. Other early issues of a new book that becomes a hit are often, in the short run, more in demand than the first issue because fewer people have them.

But how do you know which new books will be in demand? Again, go to the creative team and consider their reputations. Look at the subject matter and think about it. Is it silly enough? Is it too silly? Superheroes have the best track record for post-1960 comics, but there are types to avoid as well as look for. Opposite sex clones like *She-Hulk* and *Spider-woman* are not at all promising. For that matter, female heroes in general don't do well. Superhero team books seem to have a better shot at success than single heroes. Marvel has done much better overall than D.C. comics during the last twenty years. Recent D.C.s are not in great demand (the *New Teen Titans* and *Warlord* being the major exceptions). Then, there is *The X-Men*, a book so popular that every issue since *Giant-Size X-Men #1* has proven to be an excellent investment after being only one year old. Always in the forefront of your mind should be a good answer to the question: "How long will this book take to quadruple in value on the wholesale market?"

After you've chosen what looks ripe for investment, you must decide on the quantities of each to order. One hundred copies of the same book may sound like a lot, but it's not if the book is successful. So it's more a matter of how much you have to spend that will determine your quantities than anything else. Anything worth buying is worth getting a minimum of fifty copies. For one thing, it's easy to move many copies of a good book and for another, there are usually only a few items worth investing in on any one month's order form, and you've got to meet that minimum order. The best reason to purchase large quantities is that you'll make more money in less time.

How much might you really make doing this? Well, say you bought 1,000 copies of *The X-Men #137* at a 50-percent discount. It would've cost you $375. Today, you can easily get $2.50 apiece for them. That makes your total investment worth $2,500. Not bad for a fifteen-month wait. Turn around and put that money into something like *Fantastic Four #236* and you've got the snowball rolling.

Which brings me to prediction time. When it comes to the question: "Which monthly book coming out now will be worth the most a year from now?" most dealers will tell you how its got to be *The X-Men* or the *New Teen Titans*. Me, I'm putting my top dollar on John Byrne's current run of the *Fantastic Four*. The enormous popularity *The X-Men* enjoys did not exist before Byrne drew the book (though I don't think his leaving will seriously affect sales in the short run). Byrne is undoubtably the most popular artist working regularly in comics today and after seeing the first three issues of the *Fantastic Four* (issues 232 to 234), I'm convinced that he can do it all: write, pencil and ink, and do it all well. The directions in which he's taking the characters will have fans interested and talking for years. Well, we'll see. ■

Mitch Cohn serves as an investment counselor for Once a Month Productions.

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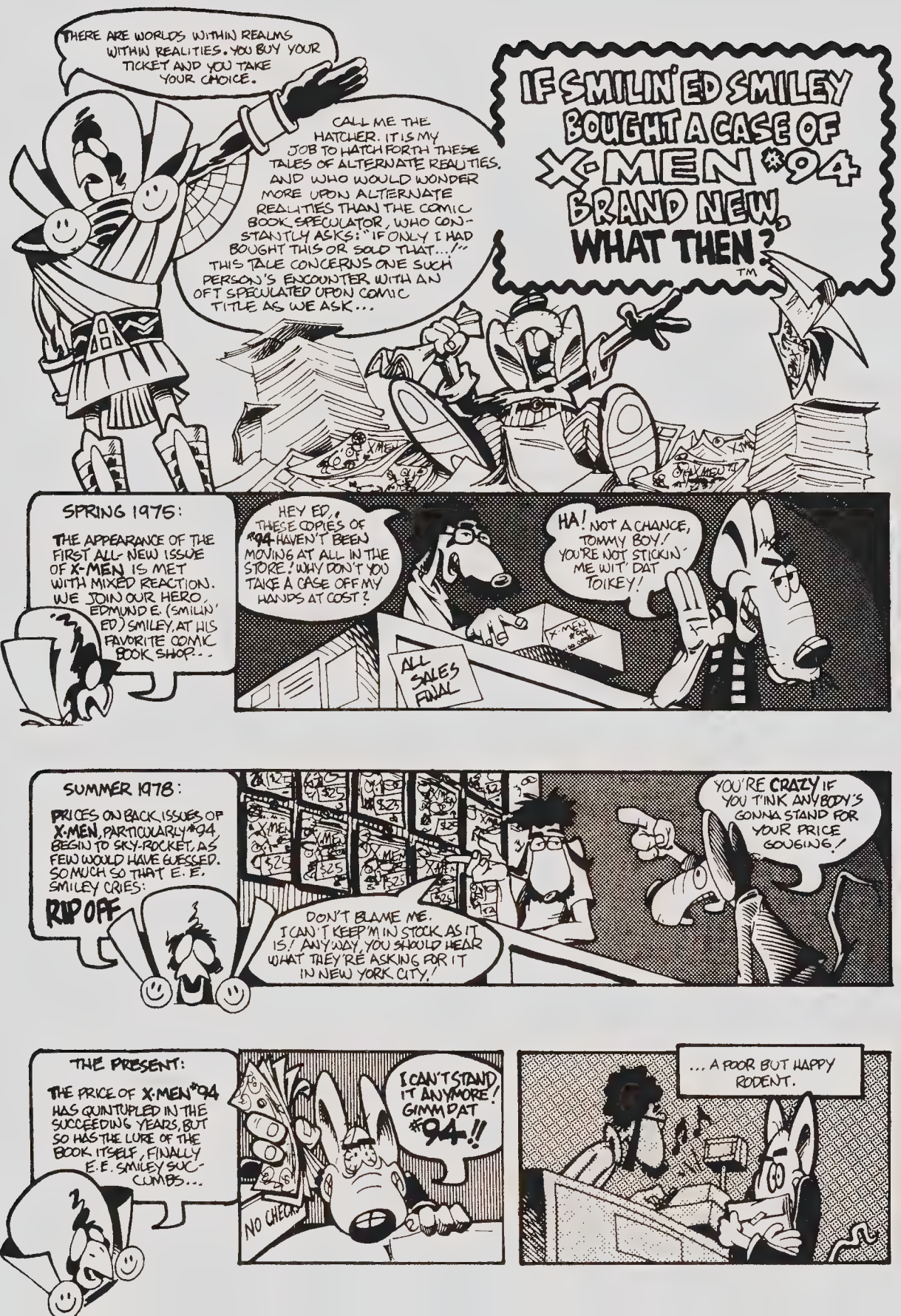
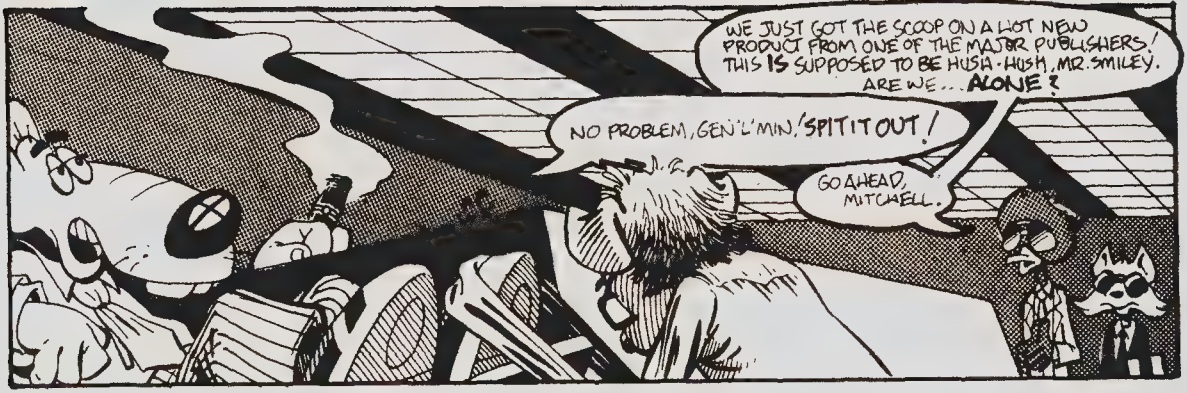
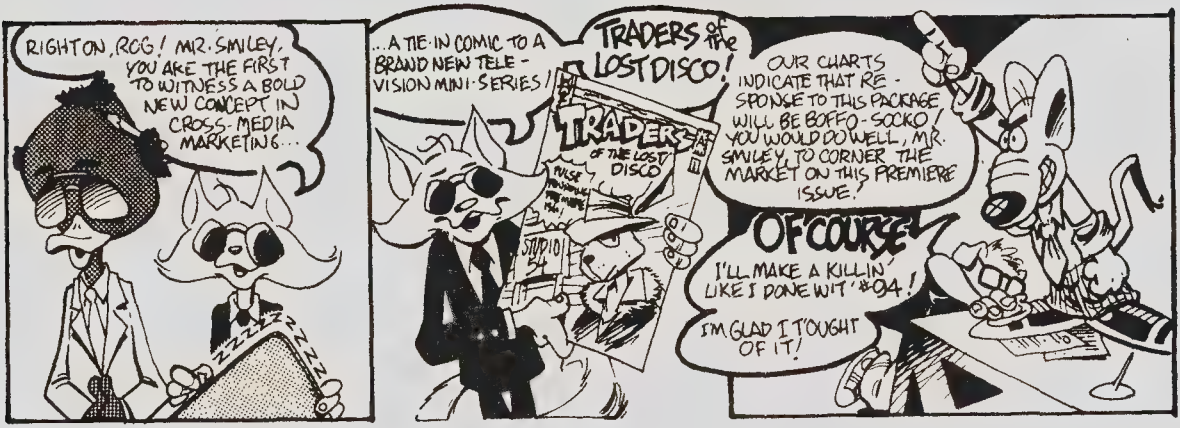
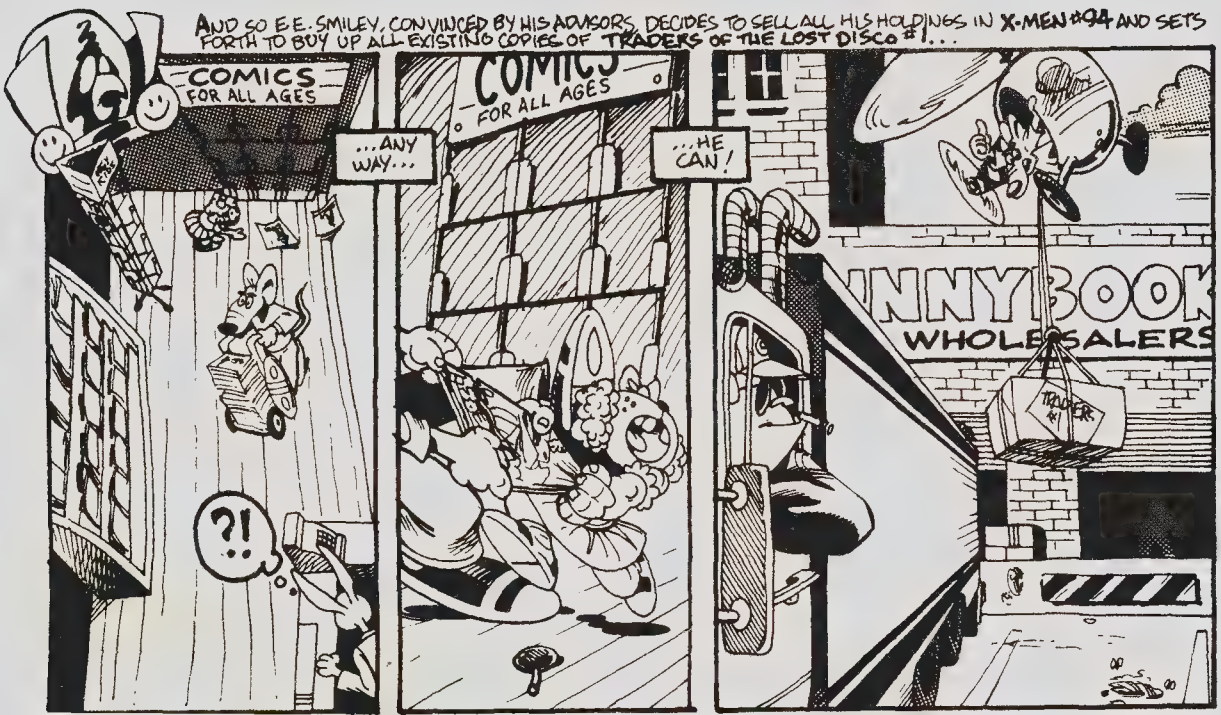

THERE ARE WORLDS WITHIN REALMS WITHIN REALITIES. YOU BUY YOUR TICKET AND YOU TAKE YOUR CHOICE.
CALL ME THE HATCHER. IT IS MY JOB TO HATCH FORTH THESE TALES OF ALTERNATE REALITIES. AND WHO WOULD WONDER MORE UPON ALTERNATE REALITIES THAN THE COMIC BOOK SPECULATOR, WHO CONSTANTLY ASKS: "IF ONLY I HAD BOUGHT THIS OR SOLD THAT..." THIS TALE CONCERNS ONE SUCH PERSON'S ENCOUNTER WITH AN OFT SPECULATED UPON COMIC TITLE AS WE ASK...
IF SMILIN' ED SMILEY BOUGHT A CASE OF X-MEN #94 BRAND NEW, WHAT THEN?
TM
SPRING 1975:
THE APPEARANCE OF THE FIRST ALL-NEW ISSUE OF X-MEN IS MET WITH MIXED REACTION. WE JOIN OUR HERO, EDMUND E. (SMILIN' ED) SMILEY, AT HIS FAVORITE COMIC BOOK SHOP...
HEY ED, THESE COPIES OF #94 HAVEN'T BEEN MOVING AT ALL IN THE STORE! WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A CASE OFF MY HANDS AT COST?
HA! NOT A CHANCE, TOMMY BOY! YOU'RE NOT STICKIN' ME WIT' DAT TOIKEY!
ALL SALES FINAL
SUMMER 1978:
PRICES ON BACK ISSUES OF X-MEN, PARTICULARLY #94, BEGIN TO SKY-ROCKET, AS FEW WOULD HAVE GUESSED. SO MUCH SO THAT E. E. SMILEY CRIES:
RIP OFF
DON'T BLAME ME. I CAN'T KEEP 'M IN STOCK AS IT IS! ANYWAY, YOU SHOULD HEAR WHAT THEY'RE ASKING FOR IT IN NEW YORK CITY!
YOU'RE CRAZY IF YOU T'INK ANYBODY'S GONNA STAND FOR YOUR PRICE GOUGING!
THE PRESENT:
THE PRICE OF X-MEN #94 HAS QUINTUPLED IN THE SUCCEEDING YEARS, BUT SO HAS THE LURE OF THE BOOK ITSELF, FINALLY E.E. SMILEY SUCCUMBS...
I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE! GIMM DAT #94!!
NO CHECK
... A POOR BUT HAPPY RODENT.

BUT LET US TURN BACK THE CLOCK TO ANOTHER REALITY, IN WHICH OUR HERO DECIDES DIFFERENTLY ON THAT FATEFUL DAY IN 1975 AND DOES INDEED PURCHASE THAT CASE OF X-MEN #94!
HIS ASCENT AS A BUSINESSMAN IS SLOW BUT SURE...
...FROM STREET CORNER...
Ed's Lemonade + X-MEN STAND
..TO STORE FRONT...
X-MEN EMPORIUM
THIS WEEK'S SPECIAL
VISORS for the beach
...TO HIS VERY OWN COMIC BOOK EMPIRE...
BY THE TIME I GET TO PHOENIX SHE BE RISIN' SCOOBY DOOO
X-MEN INTERNATIONAL
... WHERE E.E. SMILEY IS APPROACHED BY HIS FINANCIAL ADVISORS.
ahhh... MR. SMILEY!
YEAH BOYS? WHAT'S ON YOUR MINDS?


WE JUST GOT THE SCOOP ON A HOT NEW PRODUCT FROM ONE OF THE MAJOR PUBLISHERS! THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE HUSH-HUSH, MR. SMILEY. ARE WE... ALONE?
NO PROBLEM, GEN'L'MIN, SPIT IT OUT!
GO AHEAD, MITCHELL.


RIGHT ON, ROG! MR. SMILEY, YOU ARE THE FIRST TO WITNESS A BOLD NEW CONCEPT IN CROSS-MEDIA MARKETING...
ZZZZZZZZZ
...A TIE-IN COMIC TO A BRAND NEW TELE-VISION MINI-SERIES!
TRADERS of the LOST DISCO!
TRADERS OF THE LOST DISCO
STUDIO 54
OUR CHARTS INDICATE THAT RE-SPONSE TO THIS PACKAGE WILL BE BOFFO-SOCKO! YOU WOULD DO WELL, MR. SMILEY, TO CORNER THE MARKET ON THIS PREMIERE ISSUE.
OF COURSE
I'LL MAKE A KILLIN' LIKE I DONE WIT' #94!
I'M GLAD I TOUGHT OF IT!


AND SO E.E. SMILEY, CONVINCED BY HIS ADVISORS, DECIDES TO SELL ALL HIS HOLDINGS IN X-MEN #94 AND SETS FORTH TO BUY UP ALL EXISTING COPIES OF TRADERS OF THE LOST DISCO #1...
COMICS FOR ALL AGES
...ANY WAY...
?!
COMICS FOR ALL AGES
...HE CAN!
WHOLESALERS

OK! I DONE IT! I SUNK EVERY T'ING I OWN INTA DESE MAGS! AND I BEEN SITTIN' ON 'EM FOR A MONTH LIKE YA TOLD ME TO! NOW WHAT?!
NOW IS THE TIME, MR. SMILEY, TO ENTER PLAN B!
PLAN B? I HOPE YOU GUYS KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOIN'!
OH, WE DO!
OUR DEMOGRAPHICS SHOW DEMAND AT IT'S PEAK SINCE YOU EFFECTIVELY CUT OFF ALL DISTRIBUTION FOR TRADERS #1!
NOW WE ACT, MR. SMILEY, WITH A WELL PLACED AD IN THE WEEKLY TRADE JOURNALS!
hmm...
SUNDAY AUCTION
Special Never Before Seen Comic Book Blockbuster
Xavier Sch
Now Accep
Students
FINALLY, THE DAY ARRIVES AS E.E. SMILEY MAKES THE PITCH OF HIS LIFETIME.
O.K. FOLKS, I'M PULLIN' OUT ALL THE STOPS! I GOT HUNNERDS O' CASES OF A NEVER BEFORE SEEN TITLE, FORGET X-MEN #94 AN' TH' REST OF 'EM! I'M TALKIN' HOT NEW PRODUCT HERE! I'M TALKIN' DEMOGRAPHICS TO KNOCK OUT YOUR EYEBALLS! I'M TALKIN NUMERO UNO WIT' A BULLET! I'M TALKIN STATE O' TH' ART!!
I'M TALKIN' ABOUT TRADERS of the LOST DISCO #1!!
BIDDIN' STARTS AT $100 A COPY! WHADDO I HEAR?
I DROVE 4000 MILES FOR THIS?
OK. $75...
HE'S GOT TO BE KIDDING!
$25 A COPY... AN' DAT'S MY LAST OFFER!
WHAT IS HE ON?
HEY! IT'S YOUR LOSS!
I HATE COMICS!
$10 A COPY
$5
C'MON!
A DOLLAR A CASE!!
please....

DAT DOES IT! I'M RUINED! TH' T.V. SERIES WAS CANCELLED AN' I'M STUCK WIT' AN ENTIRE RUN OF BOW-WOWS! CANCEL MY EST APPOINTMENT. SIGH!

WELL, MR. SMILEY, AT LEAST YOU CAN REST ASSURED THAT THING CAN'T GET WORSE.

BZZZZ

yeah...

MR SMILEY... TWO POLICE OFFICERS TO SEE YOU.

LUVERLY! SEND 'EM IN.

MR. SMILEY?

uh huh..

WE HAVE A SUBPOENA FOR YOU, MR. SMILEY. YOU ARE BEING CHARGED WITH PRICE FIXING, RESTRAINT OF TRADE, ATTEMPTING TO ESTABUSH A MONOPOLY IN VIOLATION OF FEDERAL ANTI-TRUST STATUTES, **AND** PEDDLING WITHOUT A LICENSE.

I HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD LAWYER, SIR.

AND SO WE SEE HOW WORSE THINGS **CAN** GET...

STORM WARNING

THE ZOO

COMIC CZAR CONVICTED

'Traders' Trader to be sentanced

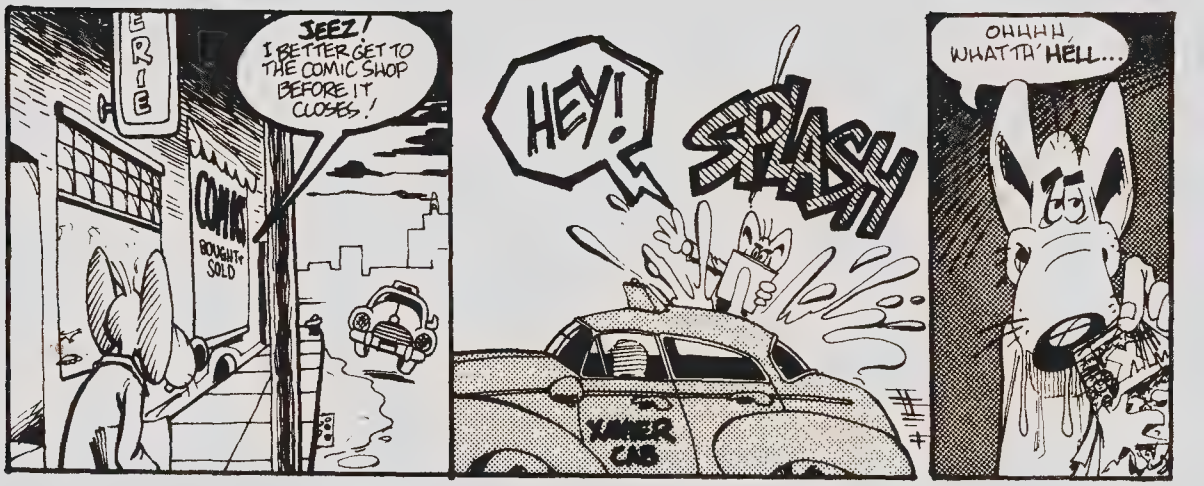
I SLEPT WITH PROFESSOR X - by ANONYMOUS

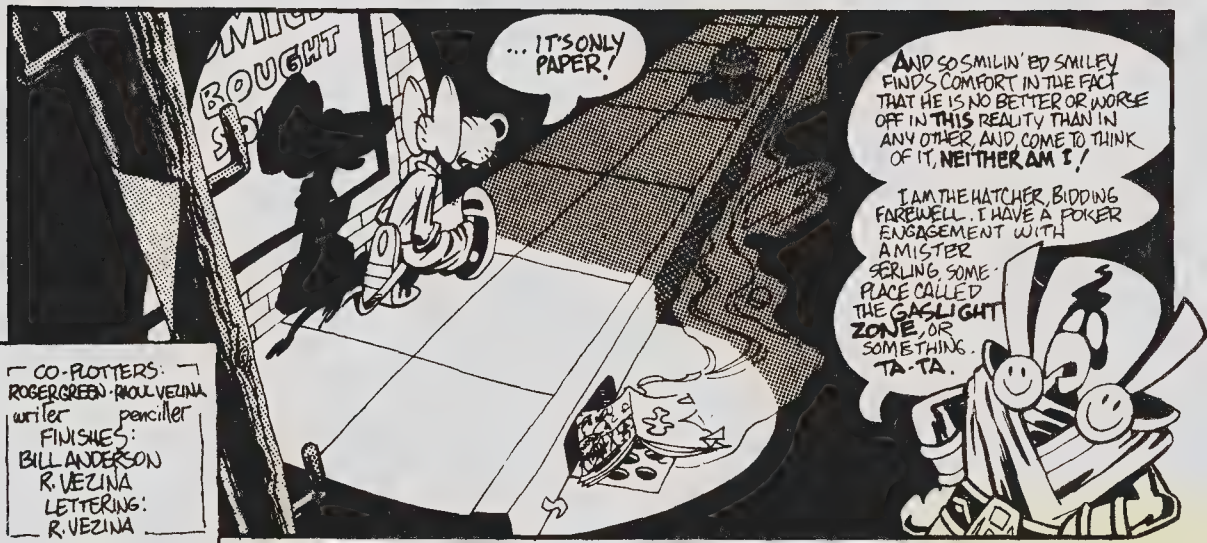
IT IS THE OPINION OF THIS COURT THAT **YOU**, MR. SMILEY, ARE LOWER THAN THE LOWEST GUTTER SNIPE AND SHOULD BE SUBJECTED TO THE SEVEREST PENALTY OF THE LAW. THIS COURT FINES YOU $940,000 (OR ONE DOZEN **X-MEN** #94) COURT ADJOURNED.

WHAT WILL YOU DO **NOW**, MR. SMILEY?

WHAT'S THE PENALTY FOR MAN-SLAUGHTER?

EVICTED!... WIT' NUTTIN' TO MY NAME BUT THE SHOIT ON MY BACK...
X-MEN INTERNATIONAL
... AN' MY ONE LAST COPY OF X-MEN #94.
POST NO BILLS
CYCLOPS COME HOME
I GUESS I'LL CASH DIS IN FOR SOME MEAL MONEY. WHAT ELSE IS DERE?


ERIE
JEEZ! I BETTER GET TO THE COMIC SHOP BEFORE IT CLOSES!
COMICS BOUGHT & SOLD
HEY!
SPLASH
XMEN CAB
OHHHH, WHATTH' HELL...


... IT'S ONLY PAPER!
AND SO SMILIN' ED SMILEY FINDS COMFORT IN THE FACT THAT HE IS NO BETTER OR WORSE OFF IN THIS REALITY THAN IN ANY OTHER, AND COME TO THINK OF IT, NEITHER AM I!
I AM THE HATCHER, BIDDING FAREWELL. I HAVE A POKER ENGAGEMENT WITH A MISTER SERLING, SOME PLACE CALLED THE GASLIGHT ZONE, OR SOMETHING. TA-TA.
CO-PLOTTERS: ROGER GREEN · RAUL VEZINA
writer penciller
FINISHES: BILL ANDERSON R. VEZINA
LETTERING: R. VEZINA

New Kids on the Block

A discussion of the X-Men and the New Teen Titans

by J.A. Fludd

THERE'S A CURIOUS PARALLEL IN THE history of comics, and it goes like this:

The original X-Men—Cyclops, Marvel Girl, the Angel, Iceman, and the Beast—were created in the early '60s by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby for Marvel Comics. The premise was that these five superheroes were teenagers—and *mutants*, born with powers and traits that set them apart from the rest of humanity. After Lee and Kirby left the book, its primary writer was Roy Thomas and it was drawn at various times by Werner Roth, Jim Steranko, Barry Smith and Neal Adams.

The X-Men should have been a tremendous success. Instead, it was a disappointment. Granted, there was a clique of fans who dearly loved the mutant kids, but they weren't enough. Marvel traumatized its audience by canceling *The X-Men* after 66 issues. Until issue 94, it was all reprints (and all depressing, as the X-Men ventured from oblivion only in occasional guest appearances in other books).

Meanwhile, D.C. Comics, Marvel's strongest competitor, had its own series about superkids. This was the *Teen Titans*, and its members were all characters who had been created to give a "youth appeal" to some of the company's biggest stars: Robin, Wonder Girl, Kid Flash, Aqualad and Speedy. *The Teen Titans*, this bunch of adolescent sidekicks, also had a loyal and devoted following that was not enough to save it from cancellation. It was the same story: popular, but not popular *enough*.

In the middle of the 1970s, Marvel assigned writer Len Wein and artist Dave Cockrum to revive *The X-Men*. What the group's faithful—and very surprised—supporters got was both a revival and a *revision*. All of the old X-Men except Cyclops left the group, to be replaced by a new *international* team of young mutants: Storm, Colossus, Nightcrawler, the Wolverine (who had made his debut in *The Incredible Hulk*), Thunderbird (who was promptly killed on the grounds that his powers and personality were unworkable), Sunfire (who left the group immediately after the first adventure), and the Banshee (who was eventually stripped of his powers and dismissed). For the purists out there, the Banshee and Sunfire had already appeared with the old X-Men but not as members.

True believers hardly need to be reminded that *The X-Men* made the most spectacular comeback in comics history. The once-canceled series is now one of the most popular comic books in the world.

Some five years after the comeback of the X-Men, Len Wein was working at the "Distinguished Competition" as an editor and proposed to Marv Wolfman (who'd just come from Marvel) a revival of the *Teen Titans*. The artist chosen to work with Wolfman had also come over from Marvel: it was none other than George Perez, the sultan of super-teams. Robin, Wonder Girl and Kid Flash were brought back together; Beast Boy from the old *Doom Patrol* was brought in as the Changling; and Perez designed three brand-new Teen Titans for the revived series: Raven, Starfire and Cyborg.

And here is where that "curious parallel" brings us: the *New Teen Titans* is the most popular new series to come from D.C. in years. Reader response has been tremendously favorable, and sales figures are way up. It's a phenomenon that bears some discussion.

The success of the new X-Men and Teen Titans ties in with a current pop-culture phenomenon: audiences can't seem to get enough of wildly elaborate science-fiction with fascinating characters and stunning visual effects. These two series are a combination of all these things, with the added element of super-powered heroes in colorful costumes.

Look at the visual dazzle-act that Dave Cockrum and John Byrne have pulled on a routine basis in *The X-Men*. This series has shown us some simply beautiful costume designs, from the outfits of the new X-Men themselves, to the costumes of the Imperial Guard and Alpha Flight, to the elegantly kinky attire of the White and Black Queens. We've seen intergalactic starships that resemble flying insects and hidden fortresses and strange kingdoms drawn in eye-popping detail. The powers of the new X-Men and their adversaries are no less impressive: Storm's preternatural influence over the weather, Colossus's transformation into steel, Nightcrawler's fire-and-brimstone teleportation and his predilection for fading out in shadows, the power of Magneto, the "reality-warp" of Mutant X/Proteus, and—best of all—the awesome "Phoenix-Effect" of the heroine who had once been Marvel Girl.

The X-Men is also one of the most literate, sensitive and complex comics on the market. You'd think that scriptwriter Chris Claremont had studied the structure of Russian novels and seen every episode of *All My Children* before he started to work on *The X-Men*. The plots are genuinely good science-fiction, tailored to the comics format. Claremont consistently shows a firm grasp of concepts and pulls off every story as a dramatic situation in which personalities play a meaningful part in the action. The characters of the X-Men are so well-defined that each one is an individual with thoughts and feelings that the reader knows and understands. The villains come across equally vividly at times: Proteus, for example, is a ravenous creature born of rape—a being whose very existence is one of hatred and hostility. *The X-Men* represents the state of the art in comics: from the moment the reader opens to page one to the time he puts it down, it becomes absolutely *real*.

Wein and Wolfman have tried to discourage comparisons between their *New Teen Titans* and *The X-Men*, but comparisons are inevitable because the *New Teen Titans*—which is not a year old at this writing—seems to be hitting upon all the same elements that made the new *X-Men* a success. Again, we have old kid heroes (Robin, Wonder Girl, Kid Flash, Changeling) teamed up with kid heroes created especially for the new series (Raven, Starfire, Cyborg). As the different nationalities and ethnic groups of the new X-Men (an African, a Russian, a German, a Canadian, an Apache Indian, a Japanese, an Irishman and lately a Jew in the person of Kitty Pryde) gave that group a sense of diversity, so it is with Perez's three new Titans. Raven is a mystic from another dimension, Starfire is an alien princess, Cyborg is black.

The visual repertoire of the *New Teen Titans* seems limited compared to that of *The X-Men*, but that may be only because the book is (at present) only twelve issues old. Some of Perez's inventions for the series seem a bit derivative. When Starfire flies, her hair leaves blazing trails behind her, as in John Byrne's visualization of Phoenix. Raven's astral "soul-self" calls the "Phoenix-Effect" to mind. Remember, though, that George Perez is working with only three characters of his own design; the other Teen Titans are carried-over from two previous groups. Dave Cockrum with *The X-Men* got to visualize four new characters (granted, one of them was killed), as well as to alter Cyclops and change Marvel Girl into Phoenix. The most that George was able to do with the pre-existing Teen Titans was to drop the neckline on Wonder Girl's costume. (In a *Comic Times* interview, he confessed that he would love to re-design Robin, but

Robin is an institution and cannot be changed.)

In every other way, though, George Perez has made the *New Teen Titans* distinctly his own book. It is largely his style, his visual approach, that has made the Titans a hit. The Perez style relies on idealized figures who are as much at home lounging around a swimming pool or posing for a designer jeans advertisement as they are in a cosmic battle. The key words with Perez are power and detail. The sense of awe and wonder are turned up. Skyscraper panoramas are turned into monumental architecture; perspective goes crazy and not a window, ledge or cornice is left out. The architecture of Raven's home dimension is an endless repetition of bird-forms fused with structures that recall the temples of the ancient Greeks. The tropical planet of Tamaran, from which Starfire came, is a pristine paradise. When Perez hurls his characters through these and other settings, he spares his audience no detail. *Everything* is there to be studied and gasped at.

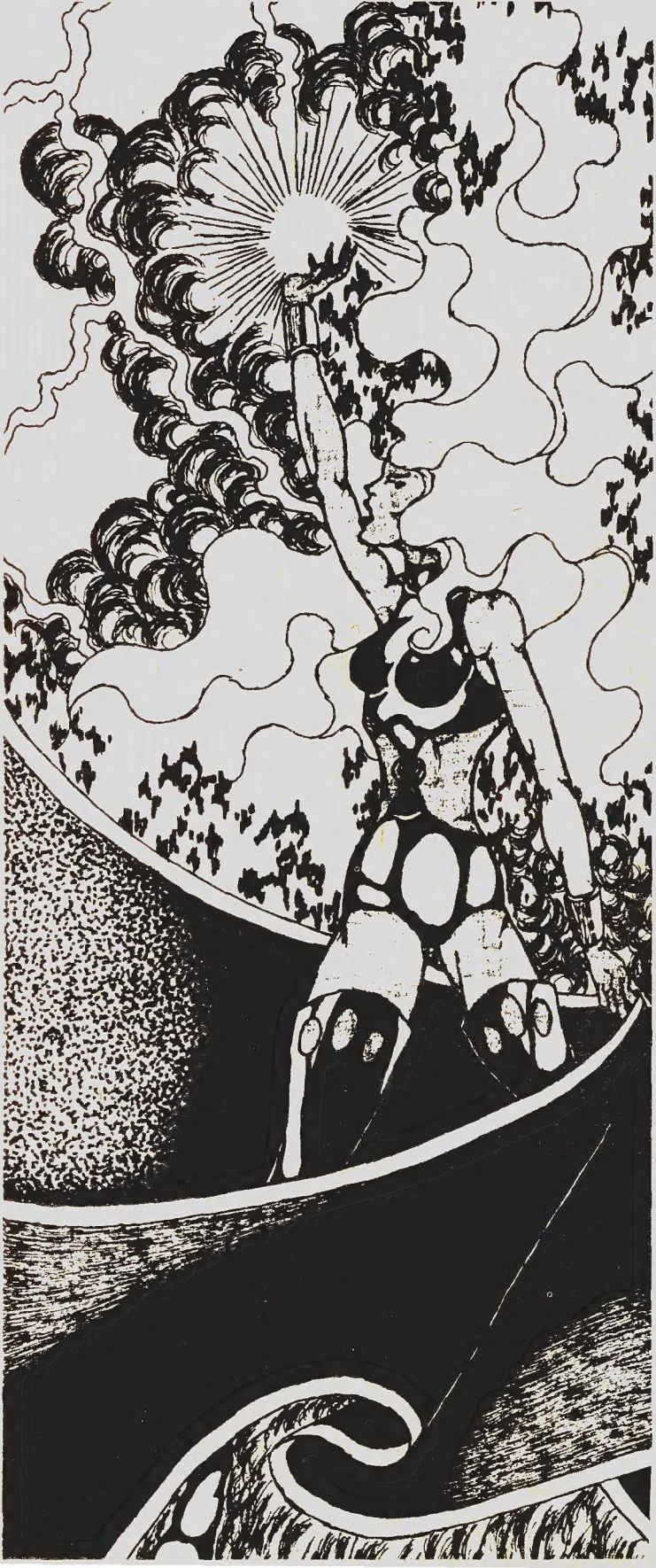
This brings us to Marv Wolfman's stories. Never before has a comic writer woven such a deviously intricate excuse for bringing superheroes together and putting them in their own headquarters. Dostoyevsky would have been proud of the way Raven maneuvered the disbanded and aimless Titans into reforming the team, rescuing Starfire from the Gordanians (a race of reptilian slave traders from another planet) and battling Trigon—with pauses along the way to fight the Ravager and the Terminator, the Fearsome Five and the Justice League of America. All this, while Cyborg's dying father builds Titans' Tower as his last gift to his embittered son.

While some of Wolfman's dialogue may be a bit stiff and his narrations slightly cliched in comparison with Claremont's writing for *The X-Men*, he shows the same kind of sensitivity and caring for the way his heroes feel. We can sense Robin's alienation from Batman in his burning need to "prove himself" on his own and as leader of the Titans. (Wolfman has gone so far as to have Robin drop out of college.) We can understand Kid Flash's confusion over whether he should be a superhero or an ordinary guy—these feelings made worse by his confusion over Raven, who made him fall in love with her to get him back into the team. Cyborg, who started out as a black version of the "angry-superhero-robbed-of-his-humanity," could have been a double-cliche—but instead, Wolfman put a vulnerable, sensitive, compassionate side underneath the character's temperamental coarseness. Cyborg's subplot in the first six issues had him hating his father for the accident that turned him into a man-machine. The reconcilation and the deathbed scene in issue 7 were touching and well worth waiting for.

Wolfman has taken great pains to humanize all of his Teen Titans, often with touching and inspiring results—such as Raven's triumph over the limitations of her "soul-self" in issue 8, and Cyborg's relationship with the pupils of a school for children with amputated and artificial limbs. Cyborg, like Nightcrawler in the X-Men, has come to terms very well with the fact that he is *very* different from everyone around him. However, the characters who offer the most interesting comparison and contrast between the two books are Starfire in the *Titans* and Storm in *The X-Men*.

Both of these fetching young ladies are royalty, and both of them have been led by fate into lives very different from what their heritage had in store. Starfire is Princess Koriand'r of the planet Tamaran, sold into slavery by her grieving parents when she was only a child, so that Tamaran might no longer be at war with the Gordanians of the Citadel. (We still don't know enough of her background to be sure of how she gained her powers.) Storm is Princess Ororo Monroe, the daughter of a noblewoman from Kenya and a photographer from Harlem. After her parents were killed in a bombing, Ororo wandered the streets of Cairo and was raised by a thief and lockpick—who taught her his "craft." She discovered her mutant power to control the weather and became a kind of "earth-goddess," wandering the African wilderness. The natives came to worship her. Ororo gave up her "godhood" and took her place with her fellow mutants in the X-Men. Koriand'r escaped the Gordanians to join the Teen Titans. And the comparisons can go still further.

These are two women who combine a kind



of exotically earthy sex appeal with a regal bearing and the power of superheroines. Koriand'r is named after a spice, and we can easily picture her romping around some faraway island, the sun glittering on her golden skin. Her home planet, Tamaran, is one big Garden of Eden, where the people and the wildlife live side-by-side in perfect harmony. She has thick cinnibar-colored hair that flows and curls all the way down her back, and big, bright green eyes without pupils—they're just perfect pools of green.

Ororo's name means "beauty," and she certainly is. She has cocoa-colored skin and white whipped-cream hair, with deep blue eyes as calm as a tropical sea—until she turns her powers on and they flash electrical fire. Storm and Starfire are two women who see no reason to be ashamed of their bodies (and the way the artists draw them, that's perfectly understandable). Both Storm and Starfire have been known to object to bathing suits as "unnecessary straps of cloth." One scene in *The X-Men* has Storm trying on a very revealing outfit in a clothing shop—and feeling smothered in it. A *Teen Titans* issue had Starfire taking off all her clothes and slipping into costume in the middle of Central Park, without so much as a second thought.

There are significant differences in these two ladies' attitudes, however. Storm is more reserved, more in control of herself, than Starfire. Koriand'r's people are ruled by their feelings. Emotionally, as well as physically, they "let it all hang out." On Tamaran, they've never heard of inhibitions. Starfire loves her friends in the Teen Titans with all her heart, and yet she'd think nothing of blasting a super-villain to kingdom come. (In this respect, Starfire is a parallel to Phoenix/Dark Phoenix.) Storm is repelled by the notion of killing and does not take kindly to murderous tendencies in others.

There was a wonderful scene in the *New Teen Titans* issue 2, when Starfire demonstrated her people's ability to "absorb" language through physical contact. She learned English by throwing herself at Robin and planting an enormous kiss on his mouth for two whole panels! (George Perez says Starfire has the hots for Robin because he's the only Earth-type male she knows who shows his legs. Implicit in this situation is that Koriand'r would be more than willing to fly Robin around the solar system a couple of times.) You'd never catch Storm carrying on like this. In her relationships with the other X-Men, she is much more than a "big sister" type.

Starfire's present subplot—a truly ingenious idea—has her entering the fashion model field, posing for designer jeans layouts (with Wonder Girl, her close friend, taking the pictures) and generally putting Brooke Shields to shame. Only in America—and comic books—could a gold-skinned sexpot from another planet hit the big time.

The X-Men and the *New Teen Titans*: which one is better? Is either one really better than the other? It would be easy to write off D.C.'s new Titans as a cheap effort at cashing in on the popularity of the X-Men—but then, cynicism is always an easy attitude to take. Marv Wolfman and George Perez have made a genuine effort to carve out a special niche for their book in the D.C. line, just as Claremont, Cockrum and Byrne have given *The X-Men* a special place in the Marvel universe. There is a wonderful, special feeling to be found in the *Titans*—a feeling that makes the reader anxious to see every new issue, because it's going to be better than the last one. It's the same feeling that makes *The X-Men* vanish very readily from the stores and causes its back-issues to be surprisingly expensive.

If the *New Teen Titans* is not yet on a par with *The X-Men*, it's only because the series is relatively young and still in its early development stages. However, Wolfman and Perez have invested their series with tremendous potential, and judging from the work these two gentlemen did in their years at Marvel Comics, it's a potential that will be fulfilled and perhaps even surpassed.

The X-Men, given the faith of its publisher and audience and the genuine concern of its creative team, became one of the very best examples of what a superhero comic book should be. There is no reason not to expect the very same of the *New Teen Titans*. Give it a chance and keep reading. With these new kids on the block, the best is yet to come. ■

Trufan Adventures

by Ward O. Batty

I LOVE TO PLAY THE PIANO.
I WISH I COULD AFFORD TO DO IT MORE OFTEN.
1978
OH NO! COCKRUM IS LEAVING THE X-MEN!
MY LIFE IS OVER. I'M SELLING MY COLLECTION!
1981
OH NO! BYRNE IS LEAVING THE X-MEN!
MY LIFE IS OVER. I'M SELLING MY COLLECTION!
I'M NOT TOO CRAZY ABOUT THESE NEW RECRUITS.
THE OPERA SINGER FILLING IN FOR BANSHEE IS BAD ENOUGH BUT THIS··THIS···
HEY! WATCH IT DOWN THERE!!
...THEN YOU DIVE THROUGH BEFORE THE LASER CUTS YOU IN HALF...
...AND THAT'S THE PRACTICE FOR TODAY.
I ASSUME YOU'VE CLEARED ALL THIS WITH MY AGENT.
THINGS HAVEN'T BEEN THE SAME SINCE THE MUTANT GUILD WAS FORMED.